

I B N S A ' U D
T H E P U R I T A N K I N G O F A R A B I A



His Majesty King Abdul Aziz ibn Abdul Rahman ibn Faisal
as Sa'ud.

*Photograph taken outside the royal palace in Riyadh by H. E. Shaikh
Hafidh Wahba.*

IBN SA'UD

THE PURITAN KING OF ARABIA

by

KENNETH WILLIAMS



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CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION	9
I IN EXILE	15
II AN HISTORIC EXPLOIT	24
III RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM	29
IV REVENGE IN NAJD	50
V HUMBLING THE TURK	59
VI SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS	66
VII A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS	74
VIII THE CONQUEST OF THE HASA	84
IX THE WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR	91
X JEALOUSY BETWEEN RIYADH AND MECCA	103
XI BRITISH POLICY IN ARABIA	111
XII MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA AT LAST	121
XIII FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT	135
XIV STORM CLOUDS IN THE DESERT	153
XV EXIT KING HUSAIN	162
XVI THE SULTAN BECOMES A KING	178
XVII THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT MECCA	187
XVIII ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST	197
XIX A FRONTIER AFLAME	214
XX THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR	223
XXI THE MEETING OF THE KINGS	234
XXII POWER AND POVERTY	243
XXIII SCIENCE IN THE DESERT	247
XXIV ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER	253

C O N T E N T S

XXV	THE CAUSE OF IBN SA'UD	265
XXVI	RELIGION AND POLITICS	275
XXVII	THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM	285
	INDEX	293

MAPS

ARABIA AND ADJACENT COUNTRIES	14
CENTRAL ARABIA	134
THE ARABIAN PENINSULA	244

GENEALOGICAL TREES

THE SA'UDI DYNASTY	49
THE RASHID DYNASTY	133

P R E F A C E

IN 1925 I heard the late Dr. Hogarth, a keen and wise observer of Arabian problems, declare that nothing would surprise him less than to find, within five years or so, the Wahhabis deposed from the Hijaz and the Sharifian family again in authority there. Mr. St. John Philby, on the other hand, himself a Muslim and a Wahhabi, has staked his reputation on the permanence of the present regime in the Holy Land of Islam.

In this historical biography no such prophecy is essayed. What is aimed at is rather a popular presentation of a man who, even if his work were to die with him, must be accounted unique.

No one can write on Wahhabi Arabia without being under an obligation to Mr. St. John Philby, to whom the major credit is due for having discovered to the public of the West the virtues of Ibn Sa'ud; and to his writings, as to those of Mr. Ameen Rihani, I gratefully acknowledge my debt.

For the Frontispiece, as also for much courtesy and kindness, my thanks are due to Ibn Sa'ud's Minister in London, His Excellency Shaikh Hafidh Wahba.

But for the views expressed in this book I alone am responsible.

KENNETH WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTION

'I have built up this kingdom single-handed, God the Almighty being my sole support; God has sent me victorious.' —
King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud at a great tribal conference at Riyadh, 1928.

If the reader has outlived his Virgil, if for him a tale of arms and a man is no longer tolerable, if, especially, the story of warfare waged in the name of religion appears to him but cant and wastage, let him stop here. The world of Arabia is neither home nor object of study for the decadent agnostic or the philosophical pacifist: nor is it likely ever so to be. The supreme product of this otherwise barren Peninsula is Man; and it is emphatically of a Man (I do not say a Superman) acting under the impetus of an all-informing faith, that I write here.

King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud, lord of the Dual Monarchy of the Hijaz-Najd (now known, in honour of his House, as Sa'udia) won his position, as all rulers in Arabia must win a new position, by force and personality. In this primitive land lineage counts, certainly; but Arabia contains the severest democracy in the world. Power to command cannot be held through aristocratic descent alone. Nowhere is a sharper distinction drawn between absolutism and autocracy, and a successful sovereign must be as much loved as feared of his people.

INTRODUCTION

Abdul Aziz has been called the greatest Arab since the Prophet Muhammad: a journalistic appellation, perhaps, but one not easy to gainsay. More comprehensibly he is styled the 'Cromwell of Arabia'; and if that is taken to imply that he is at once a born fighter, profoundly religious though iconoclastic, and an iron administrator who has carved his way to eminence by sword and faith and preserved it by firmness and generosity, the comparison is useful.

The parallel should not, however, be pushed too far. Puritanism in Arabia is likely to emerge far more often and to disappear far less completely than possibly anywhere else on earth. There can, in the nature of things, be little reaction from it. For the desert, which provides no luxuries, breeds and stimulates as few things can a simple faith in Allah. To the Badawin there is scarcely a mid-station between a burning, triumphant creed on the one hand, and, on the other, internecine warfare in which, but for the sense of the Unity of God, religion is forgotten or but mechanically observed. It is the superlative merit of Ibn Sa'ud that he has directed this fiery Puritanism into constructive channels, that, while keeping the centre of Wahhabism at white heat, he has prevented the hungry flame from scorching others and so from burning itself out in profitless extensions.

In the realization of this necessity he demarcates himself from all his forbears.

King Abdul Aziz ascribes his conquests, not in the

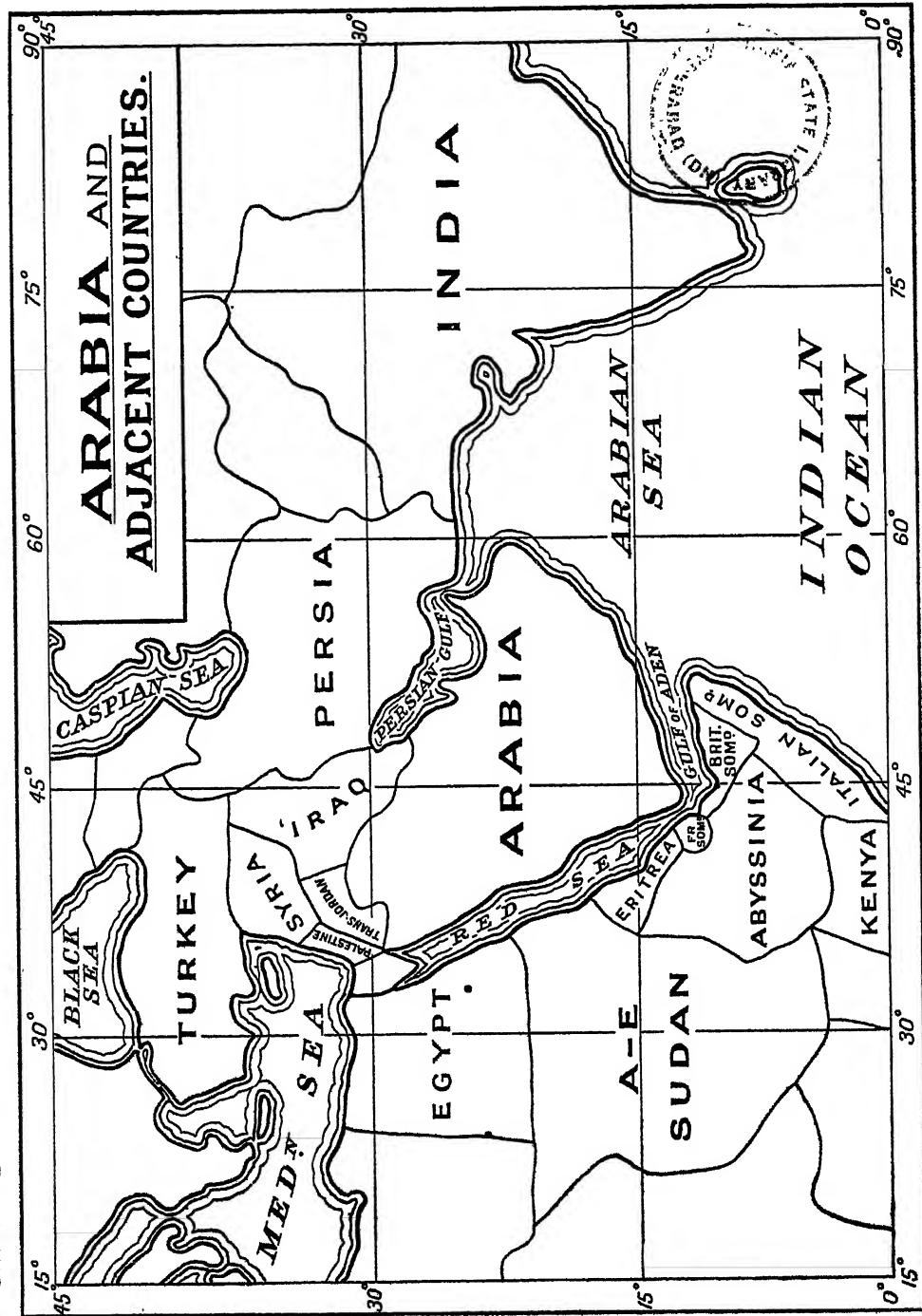
INTRODUCTION

formal and often insincere way of other rulers, to the Divine Purpose. True, he is neither bigot nor fatalist. He 'keeps his powder dry'. Nor does he dispense with the inventions of science to preserve intact and to administer more efficiently his vast kingdom. But if it is his personal genius which has accomplished the miraculous result of cementing the warlike and hitherto mutually hostile tribes of Central Arabia, if it is his peculiar ambition and intimate knowledge of Badawin character which have amalgamated the Arab lands bordering the Persian Gulf and those bordering the Red Sea, it is his pure, unswerving Puritan faith which has spurred him on and yet kept him humble.

He acts as he prays in the name of Allah. He obeys literally the dictates of the earliest form of the Islamic religion. In a world of increasing secularization he stands, as a ruler, almost alone.

I B N S A ' U D

T H E P U R I T A N K I N G O F A R A B I A



CHAPTER I

IN EXILE

The Rise of Hail — Eclipse of the Sa'uds — Kuwait — Shaikh Mubarak — A Premature Effort — 1880 — 1901

PROPHECY in Arabian politics has hitherto been futile, owing to the instability of the Peninsula. This has originated in the extreme difficulty of systematizing or informing any particular kind of administration or governance, a difficulty arising from the character alike of its inhabitants and of the physical potentialities of the country. In previous centuries the longevity of a dynasty had depended wholly on the personality of each particular ruler, and although things have changed in certain ways since the Great War, it must always be mainly the genius of an Arabian monarch which determines the duration of his sway.

Now nothing seemed more improbable, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the subject of this book was born, than a revival of the Wahhabi cause, which, directed by the House of Sa'ud, had at the beginning of that century made the Ottoman Power almost quiver in dread and had spread through the world of Islam new messages of hope

and fear. There was then no hint of any Arab renascence — in the sense, at any rate, understood by post-War generations. Although individual shaikhs and rulers in Arabia continued their habits of inter-tribal raiding and of quite frequently forgetting their nominal allegiance to the distant Turkish Government, there was among them no concerted effort to throw off the shackles, however fitfully or lightly imposed from Constantinople, of the Ottoman Power.

The House of Sa'ud, in particular, seemed to be virtually defunct. This dynasty rose to local fame in Najd in the middle of the eighteenth century, when it espoused the views of the reformer, Muhammad Abdul Wahhab, a learned Muslim, who, having studied abroad, returned to Central Arabia to preach what is commonly known as the Puritanical form of Islam. Thereafter it flourished exceedingly, extracting alimentation from neighbouring lands almost at will.

Its expanding power, however, was crushed in the earlier part of the nineteenth century by the Egyptian generals, Muhammad Ali and Ibrahim Pasha, whose rout of the Wahhabis across the burning deserts of Western Arabia has scarcely attracted the military attention it deserves. But though driven back to its barren wastes in Najd, the House of Sa'ud succeeded in preserving for a while the cradle, so to speak, of its inspiration. Its original capital, Dar'iya, had been destroyed by the Egyptian troops, but a new one close by, Riyadh, was soon substituted, and it ap-

I N E X I L E

peared as though the Wahhabis might there contain their souls, if not in satisfaction, at least in security.

But Arabia is seldom without some chieftain of prominent ambition and ability. The lack of natural boundaries within the Peninsula and the necessity for the nomads to move towards pasture and water — wherever these may happen to be — inhibit any hard and fast demarcation between the territories of particular rulers; and though there have been periods in Arabian history of seeming chaos and stagnation, sooner or later some man arises to dominate the scene and to found a dynasty.

Such a dynasty was provided in the nineteenth century in the House of Rashid, whose capital was in the northern desert at Haïl, the centre of the great Shammar tribe. Under the aegis of Muhammad ibn Rashid, the Arab who ruled over this region of the Jabal Shammar — as it was called after its main tribe — when Doughty visited it in the 'seventies, the whole of the northern desert was annexed to the House of Rashid.

This chieftain made a name that will live in Arabian history; but his significance was local. He accepted the overlordship of the Ottoman Government, and, indeed, his descendants were the most famous of the few Arabs who, at the call of the *Jihad* during the World War, threw in their lot with the Turks.

In 1885 this Muhammad took Riyadh, the heart of the Wahhabi Amirate. The Wahhabis, though angry

at their impotence to stem his advance, resigned themselves to it. Muhammad ruled them well. But the Sa'udis could neither forget nor forgive their humiliation. Seven years later, a section of them rose against the Shammar, after indulging in the usual acts of assassination, but was defeated.

The star of the Sa'udis, it seemed, had definitely set. Abdur Rahman, the head of the family, foreseeing the vengeance that would surely be wreaked on his rebellious House, fled to the Persian Gulf. There the Turkish authorities would have none of him. After wandering homeless for a while he, with his family, eventually found refuge in Kuwait.

Like 'snow upon the desert's dusty face', the Wahabi Empire had melted away.

Kuwait, a small town on the western side of the head of the Persian Gulf, and of comparatively recent construction, lay basking, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, under such efficient rule as it had never previously enjoyed. For despite the profits brought by the marketing of pearls and the building of boats and sails, this temporary haven of peace and prosperity had not exercised any influence on the outside world. The curious, indeed, were but barely conscious of its existence: to the ordinary traveller in these regions it signified nothing.

But its ruler at that time, Shaikh Mubarak as Sabah, was an Arab of more than one part: he was not merely

IN EXILE

an autocrat, of a type familiar in the East, the success of whose administration could be reckoned only in terms of personal aggrandizement. He had usurped the sovereignty of Kuwait in 1896. Usurpation in Arabia, by way of assassination, is possibly more common than peaceful succession. It is a recommendation rather than a bar to popular esteem. In any case, Shaikh Mubarak was a statesman. And, as the old ballad says of one who also dispensed with the legalization of enjoyed rights: 'I wot he had good need'.

For it was not only rival Arab eyes which were considering the future of Kuwait. The tribal chiefs of the inner deserts either paid tribute to Mubarak's prowess or bided the time when they might fall on and secure for themselves the riches he was storing up and the channels of trade which his state comprised. Nor were the Turks, nominal rulers of the whole of Arabia, undisturbed by his effective rule.

The vision of these Muslims, however, keen and close as it was, was less intense than that of European Imperialists, thousands of miles away. Germany at that time was fired with her *Drang nach Osten* policy, the spearhead of which was to be the *Bagdad Bahn* — the railroad from Constantinople, via Anatolia and Mesopotamia, to the Persian Gulf.

Now it was Kuwait that German statesmen and engineers envisaged as the terminus of this penetrating railway. It was at Kuwait also that the Russians

were suspected of wishing to establish a coaling station; and Count Kapnist, a Russian subject, was endeavouring to obtain a concession from the Porte for the building of a railway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. These schemes were not unknown to the Power responsible for the administration of India, and although Shaikh Mubarak's suggestion to the British Government in 1897 that he should have its protection against the Turks' probable desire to annex his territory fell on deaf or unready ears, but a year elapsed before Great Britain saw the wisdom of an understanding with the Shaikh of Kuwait. An engagement was consequently made which effectually frustrated both European and Turkish designs on Kuwait: it provided, among other things, for the inalienability of Kuwait to any Power other than Great Britain.

But at Kuwait also far different things were happening, things of more consequence to the Islamic world and infinitely more dramatic. These were the schemes being laid by a young exiled Arab, one Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud. To Europeans this port might be a goal — to Abdul Aziz it was to be a spring-board. The first ten years of his life had been spent as a scion of a once powerful House existing virtually by grace of the Rashids of Ha'il: his next ten partly as an outcast by the sea, and partly living among the Murra tribe, who roamed the country south of the Hasa, on the confines of the great desert, the *Rub'al Khali*. There are

IN EXILE

few more primitive Badawin than the Murra, of whom Ibn Sa‘ud thus gained an intimate knowledge at his most impressionable age. Such experience had seared itself into the ambitious soul of Abdul Aziz.

A stripling of commanding height — some six feet four inches — who had already shown tireless physique and suppleness of brain, this royal exile let not a month pass without strengthening his resolve to regain for his House the Throne of his forbears and to make the revered name of Abdul Wahhab once more the rallying-cry of Arabian Islam.

‘I will recapture Riyadh, *Inshallah!*’¹ said he. ‘I will restore the glories of the Sa‘uds!’

His father, Abdur Rahman, looked at him. He saw a magnificent youth, lithe, full-shouldered, well-proportioned; an unshaven face which as yet bore but little beard (none of the family runs to much hair on the face); penetrating eyes that could flash both anger and wit; and features that had not yet assumed the benign appearance of later years.

He turned away, looked at him again, smiled, then softly echoed: ‘*Inshallah!*’

But how to do it? Abdul Aziz had with him in exile at Kuwait but his father, a few relatives, and a handful of followers. Surely Shaikh Mubarak, who had given him asylum from the overthrowers of his father’s domain in Central Arabia, would help him? He certainly would. The Shaikh of Kuwait was only too

¹ That is, God willing.

eager to strike a blow against the Rashidites, more especially as their great leader, Muhammad, had died in 1897.

Carefully Abdul Aziz studied the arts of administration as displayed by the ruler of Kuwait: and lessons were then learned that stood him in good stead when, some years after the Great War, he in his turn had to deal with representatives of foreign nations. But even more ardently did he welcome and study Mubarak's plans for an expedition against the occupiers of Hail and Riyadh.

At last, at the turn of the century, he felt that his hour had struck. At the age of twenty he was in effect a subordinate general, commanding a mixed force of his own Wahhabi adherents and of the Shaikh Mubarak. With utter confidence in Allah and in his own star he trekked out, in the autumn of 1900, from Kuwait to meet the troops of Ibn Rashid. But Mubarak's intentions had been advertised and the enemy was ready for him. Moreover, whereas the main wish of Mubarak was to cripple the power of Ibn Rashid, the supreme objective of Abdul Aziz was to recapture Riyadh. He therefore detached himself from the main mixed force and went south-west towards his ancestral home. Before he could complete his success, news came of the unqualified defeat, in February, 1901, of Mubarak's force by the Rashidites at a sandy place between Sarif and Tarafiya.

IN EXILE

Luck alone could have wrought triumph for Mu-barak and Abdul Aziz. It had failed. There was nought to do but renounce the project and return to Kuwait.

The young Arab had misjudged his time: the hold of the usurping foe on the inner deserts was too strong. This expedition, it seemed, had but made Ibn Rashid's position the stronger. Was the star of the Sa'udi scion, then, not to appear? Had he misjudged also his own capacities?

CHAPTER II

AN HISTORIC EXPLOIT

The Recapture of Riyadh. — Sa'uds displace the Shammar — 1901—1902.

THE triumph of the Rashidites at Sarif was a turning-point in the career of Abdul Aziz. It was a bloody slaughter, such casualties being caused as to make Arabs say that the blood of the slain mingled with the rains to redden the running streams. A familiar enough simile, this, in Oriental history, but the experience was so memorable as to induce Abdur Rahman, Ibn Sa'ud's father, who was present with the routed forces of Mubarak, to renounce forthwith his claim to the Throne of Riyadh in favour of his son, Abdul Aziz.

To the ambition of the young Prince was now added, therefore, the responsibility of his House. At once he decided that, if Riyadh could not be captured and held by direct assault, stealth was the only practical policy.

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield.

AN HISTORIC EXPLOIT

Again he essayed the eastern deserts, this time with only the good will — in the shape of camels, arms, and food — of Shaikh Mubarak. When, a few months later, he left Kuwait, Abdul Aziz had with him a force of fewer than forty — all relatives, including his redoubtable cousin, Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, or slaves.

What could this young upstart accomplish? In the opinion of Ibn Rashid, still raiding the tribes faithful to Mubarak from his base at Hafar in the Batin valley, nothing at all.

But Ibn Sa'ud this time was determined to do or die. Roving in the eastern deserts he collected to his cause various oddments of the tribes, but, being unable immediately to satisfy the prospect they had seen of loot, he soon lost them. He had, in fact, no human material on which to build a force. From Kuwait both the ruler who had so far protected him and his father, Abdur Rahman, counselled his return, lest the little band should be shattered at the hands of Ibn Rashid.

Yet Ibn Sa'ud was no mere truant. Life was much, but honour was more. He had a mission to accomplish. After much apparently aimless wandering he found himself in the December of 1901, at Haradh wells, between the Jabrin oasis, near the great *Rub' al Khali*, or 'Empty Quarter' of Arabia, and the Hasa. There he formulated a plan. From this unsuspected point in the southern desert of Najd, not directly from the north-east, as the Rashdities might have expected,

I B N S A ' U D

he would strike a blow to regain the capital of Riyadh.

By the first few days of January, 1902, he was astride the Hasa-Riyadh route, by the wells of Abu Jifan. Then, in the middle of this historic month, he discovered his plan to his followers. It is now a classic story in Arabian annals. Leaving some twenty or thirty men concealed in the Jubail uplands, not far from Riyadh itself, he took the remainder, as dusk was falling, on to where the oasis of Riyadh begins to stand out from the desert. To those in Jubail he said: 'Look ye! There is no power or might save in God; if no message reaches you to-morrow, haste ye away. You will know that we are dead.'

Thus might Oliver Cromwell have spoken: but who, of those thus left, imagined not that by the following day they would be posting to Kuwait with such news as to bring irreparable grief to Abdur Rahman's heart and the confirmation of Mubarak's worst fears?

By the fringe of the oasis Abdul Aziz still further divided his party. He placed his brother, Muhammad, in charge of twenty men, who, lying concealed in the palm groves, should wait for the signal of success — or of failure.

Just before night shut down on the desert, Ibn Sa'ud and his faithful ten companions clambered over the ill-kept walls of Riyadh; for this they used the stem of a cut palm tree. Then they climbed over several roofs

AN HISTORIC EXPLOIT

until they came to the Governor's house. Ibn Sa'ud knocked imperiously at the door.

It was opened by a woman.

'Who are ye?' she began. 'The Governor, if it is he ye seek, sleeps in the fort to-night and will not return here until the morn.' And she commenced to shriek her fears of the unfamiliar Badawin.

'Silence!' ordered Ibn Sa'ud; and, beckoning to his followers to enter, he assembled all the women of the house and enjoined a similar silence upon them — lest swift death should not befall them. Terrified by these strange visitors, the women made not a sound.

A lattice of this house gave on to the square before the fort, where the Shammar Governor, Ajlan, was now preparing to sleep. As if by perfect pre-arrangement, the nocturnal band took up their positions by this. But not for them was sleep this night. Instead, they drank the Governor's coffee, and ate the Governor's dates, and ministered otherwise to their final resolve by reading of the Quran.

Not Cromwell himself prepared for battle with more prayer and preparation of soul. Of either fear or assurance there was no trace.

Dawn broke; and guards flung open the heavy gates of the fort. A little later, and the watchers saw slaves lead out the Governor's horses into the morning sunshine and the Governor himself and his bodyguard emerge and start for his home.

'Now!' said Ibn Sa'ud; and, issuing from the house,

they fell tremendously on the astonished attendants of Ajlan. In this open square revolvers cracked and swords flashed. Ibn Sa'ud was outnumbered, but he was well armed and had the advantage of surprise. A scrimmage ensued, that brought death to the Governor and to several of his slaves.

But before he was despatched Ajlan had managed to shout 'Quick! Shut the fort gates!' Slaves hastened to obey; but Abdullah ibn Jiluwi had foreseen this move and now performed what was to be but the first of a series of famous deeds of loyalty to Ibn Sa'ud. With a fury that could be thwarted only by death, he hurled himself forward to keep the gates open. He won. The hour had struck.

Marching into the fort, Ibn Sa'ud now had the populace at his feet. The garrison of the Rashidites surrendered; and from the turrets of this walled town was proclaimed the amazing news that a Sa'udi once more, after eleven years of exile, ruled in the capital.

Like fire the news went through the town: 'Abdul Aziz ibn Abdur Rahman ibn Faisal ibn Sa'ud our ruler! *Alhamdulillah!* (God be praised!) Long live Abdul Aziz!'

And in only less time than it takes wireless to communicate, all Arabia knew that a Sa'udi was yet again master of Riyadh. Stealth had accomplished what force was lacking to do. That night of January 15th, 1902, will be forgotten when Arabs cease to be a race of poets and epic tales are considered barbaric: not before.

CHAPTER III

RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM¹

BEFORE retailing the steps by which Ibn Sa'ud consolidated his hold on the land of his forefathers, I must here briefly relate the history of the first Wahhabi Empire which had come to so ignominious an end at the hands of the Rashids of Hail in 1885. An understanding of this first Empire, a knowledge of its successes and particularly of its mistakes, is essential if a correct estimate of the achievement of King Ibn Sa'ud and of the prospects of the present Wahhabi State's durability is to be gained.

At Ayaina, north of Riyadh, in the province of Aridh of Najd, one Shaikh Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was born in 1691. This young Arab, though bred of the desert, sought wider horizons. He travelled, a student of religious law, in various eastern lands, visited cities that had once harboured Caliphs, Damascus and Baghdad, and finally made the Pilgrimage to Mecca. He was appalled by the laxity he had seen in these 'civilized' Muslim towns. The sight of luxuries and un-Muslim habits sickened him, and

¹ I use the term 'Wahhabis' to denote the Puritan Muslims originating in Najd, where, however, it is unknown to the inhabitants themselves.

he resolved to return to his native land to preach anew the doctrines of the Prophet, shorn entirely of ungodly accretions.

About the year 1736 he came back to Dar'iya and at once began to denounce the abuses he had seen — abuses which were not wholly absent in Najd itself. Grossly superstitious practices had grown up even there. But, like many another reformer, like the Prophet himself at Mecca, his own people at first looked on him askance. Moral power, obviously, was insufficient of itself alone. For Muhammad Abdul Wahhab to have a chance of success, his teaching must be adopted by at least one of the numerous Princedoms into which Arabia at that time was divided.

Fortunately for Abdul Wahhab, an influential family, the Sa'udi family, was at hand. In 1741 he fled from his fellow citizens in Ayaina to Dar'iya, the seat of the Sa'udi family. In 1742 Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, of the Mashalikh section of the Wuld Ali — originally, therefore, of Anaiza¹ stock — became the first convert to what was known as the 'Restored' or 'Reformed' religion. This Arab Prince actually married the daughter of Abdul Wahhab. Thus were spiritual and temporal forces united, and it is not too much to say that neither one nor the other could have progressed very far by its own unaided efforts.

I would emphasize this statement. For in Arabia

¹ Ibn Sa'ud has always been proud of his Anaiza descent. In his dealings with other Arab chieftains who were unwilling to acknowledge him, he has often drawn attention to his connection with this great Arabian tribe.

RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM

a purely religious force has never of itself given to a dynasty a long reign; nor has a dynasty unsupported by religious zeal remained long in the saddle. The very doctrines of the Prophet Muhammad needed and obtained great captains of armies for their propagation and conservation. A conglomeration of factors, therefore, is necessary to secure the permanence of any rule in Arabia. Religious fervour is much, political genius is much; but if they be not supported by economic endeavour, they fail in Arabia. It was in considerable measure the lack of this third virtue among the earlier Sa'uds that ruined the first Wahhabi Empire.

But, although the Arabs at first did not take kindly to the message of Abdul Wahhab, his most difficult opponents were the Turks, who nominally ruled over Arabia and who were actually Guardians of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. Probably they did not take the trouble to understand the doctrines of the reformer. In any case, they saw in them a threat to their own easy-going ways. They therefore did all in their power to suppress Abdul Wahhab and his undesirable body of preachers, branding the reformer as one who aimed at imposing a new religion on the Faithful. The Turks it was who in their attempt to disparage the new zealots called them 'Wahhabis'. The name adhered, although it has outlived its contemptuous connotation.

In so representing Abdul Wahhab the Turks were

utterly wrong, and the Wahhabis resented bitterly this Ottoman attitude. Official repression begat fanaticism among the oppressed: so much so that the Wahhabis, ignorant townsmen and Badawin as they mostly were, conceived it their duty to kill as many Turks as possible, and, for that matter, as many 'mis-guided' Muslims as well. A miniature *Jihad*, or 'Holy War' started among the Najdis.

The movement began to assume such proportions that in 1770 the Grand Sharif of Mecca, Ahmad ibn Sa'id, caused a congress of *ulama* (learned men) to examine and to pronounce upon the doctrines of Abdul Wahhab. On each of the three test points, whether Wahhabism was a heresy, whether domes surmounting tombs were permissible, and whether saints could intercede with Allah, the Mecca congress reported in favour of the zealots of Najd.

Again, in 1815, Muhammad Ali summoned in Mecca an even more representative gathering of *ulama*. The report of these divines, made after very careful study of documents and witnesses, was a shock to the Ottoman Government. Unanimously they declared that not a single tenet of the 'New Faith' was contrary to the true Islamic religion; they even asserted that, if Wahhabism were in fact as it had been explained to them, they themselves were ardent Wahhabis!

Their verdict is as correct to-day as it was then: Wahhabism is not a heresy. It is an ascetic revivalist movement. And its followers can rightly

R E T R O S P E C T O F W A H H A B I S M

claim to belong to the orthodox Hanbali school of Sunnism.¹

But the Turks neglected the opinion of the representatives they had assembled as judges; they could scarcely be expected to countenance a movement which, if adopted throughout the Ottoman Empire, would modify profoundly the daily habits of millions of their subjects, as well as their own. They therefore remained hostile. This attitude had a sharp reaction on the Wahhabis themselves. To have their faith authoritatively upheld by a specially convoked congress, and then flouted by the overlords of the Peninsula was more than these naturally intolerant oasis-dwellers and Badawin could stand. The adherents of Abdul Wahhab and of Muhammad ibn Sa‘ud became inflamed, and neither spiritual nor temporal leader sought to decrease their fanaticism — although, it should be added, Abdul Wahhab was a peaceful man: the blazing anger was provided by the Sa‘uds. It was now a matter of life or death for the reformed creed: the Holy War must be proclaimed and energetically waged against all infidels and particularly against Muslims who had fallen away from the true path.

By the time of Abdul Wahhab’s death in Dar‘iya in 1787, it was fairly obvious that nothing but extermination could stay the progress of the ‘new faith’ in

¹ Islam is divided into Sunnis and Shiahs. There are four schools of Sunnism: Hanbali, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanafii. The Hanafis are the most numerous, the Hanbalis the most orthodox and rigid. They are, however, not rival sects, but, in the main, mutually tolerant schools.

Arabia. From lowly beginnings — for Muhammad ibn Sa‘ud was far from being the most powerful shaikh in Najd, although, before his decease in 1765, he had done memorable work in exciting religious fanaticism among the Badawin — it started to extend in every direction, east, south, north, and west.

Abdul Aziz, who succeeded his father in 1765, gradually brought in all the Najd tribes under his banner. That accomplished, he sent Wahhabi emissaries everywhere. At last, having attained great success in eastern Arabia, he turned towards the Hijaz, the Holy Land of Islam, divided as it was from Najd by no natural barrier. Here his proselytizing efforts met with a rebuff. The Grand Sharif of Mecca, Ghalib, saw that if Wahhabi doctrines were to dominate Arabia, the whole administration of the Holy Cities would have to be transformed. He resented the propaganda of Abdul Aziz to such an extent that, in the year 1792, open warfare broke out between the Hijaz and Najd. So began a long war, and so the triumph of the Wahhabis which reverberated through the world.

The Turks were now as deeply alarmed as the sluggish Ottomans were capable of being alarmed. They perceived that they wholly underestimated the new force in Central Arabia. As was their wont, they resolved to cut the noxious growth out at its roots. At Basra in 1797 they collected under Thuwaini a large army and marched confidently down to Al Hasa,

RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM

to which they laid siege. The Wahhabis met them with superb defiance.

Even at that early date in their career the Sa'uds did not lack the touch of great Soldier-Reformers. For before the battle was to begin, Abdul Aziz prayed to the Almighty:

'O Thou who hearest the prayers of the fearful and disappointeth not the hopeful, turn away from us the evil of the wicked and unbelieving; visit Thy wrath on the sinful and scatter their mighty hosts.'¹

The Wahhabis' resistance to the Turks was such that a peremptory decision to retreat was made. The best that the Turks could do was to arrange a peace with the Wahhabis for six years.

But the Wahhabis, exulting in this success against trained troops, were in no mood to observe peace arrangements. The sanctity of treaties was not included in their list of dogmas, and in the name of the Prophet they soon went swarming up towards Basra.

So far, they had met with no check. Easier converts on the Persian Gulf were found, even as far as distant Oman, in the south-east corner of the Peninsula.² The land, they felt, was theirs almost for the asking:

¹ Quoted in Philby's *Arabia*, p. 68.

² For the present-day descendants of those converted to Wahhabism at this time in Southern Arabia, see Bertram Thomas' *Alarms and Excursions in Arabia*. For the contemporaneous condition of Oman, see Said-Ruete's *Said bin Sultan*.

I B N S A ' U D

now should they carry the gospel to the richer, infidel territories of Northern Arabia.

Unchecked, and apparently uncheckable, they cut the routes that led from Iraq to the Hijaz; and those in the Holy Land of Islam whose livelihood, then as now, depended almost solely on the success of the Pilgrimage to the Holy Places, were aghast. The first direct effort of the Grand Sharif Ghalib to stem the Wahhabis had been unsuccessful. Aware of the subsequent disaster to the Turks, the Governor swallowed his pride and made an accommodation with Abdul Aziz, in order, at any rate, that the Pilgrimage might be resumed.

Yet could the Wahhabis not be restrained. Whether with or without provocation — their apologists find reasons for most of their excesses — they raided at the turn of the century right up to the Euphrates. There they pillaged and massacred, looted and sacked. In such abandon they took peculiar delight, for, although they contemned the infidel Sunnis, they contemned the infidel Shias much more. And Iraq was largely a Shiah country.

In April, 1801, the Holy City of Karbala was sacked by the fearless Puritans, now under the command of Sa'ud, the son of Abdul Aziz. The tomb of Husain (on whose beloved name the Shias cry every Month of Muhurrum) was desecrated, and all the city's inhabitants were put to the death. It was such frightfulness as had not been seen in Iraq since the Mongols

R E T R O S P E C T O F W A H H A B I S M

of Hulagu, who destroyed for ever the vast irrigation systems of that once fertile land.

Gorged with booty and self-satisfaction, Sa'ud now retired, laying waste the territory between Karbala and Basra. An iconoclast damns all the consequences.

Dar'iya went wild with delight at the triumph. Yet the Islamic world was in tears. Persia in particular, whose Faithful in Iraq had suffered most, showed unappeasable resentment, but the shock went through the world of Islam from one end to the other. Yet more terrible alarms were to come.

The futility of making treaties with these Wahhabis of the first Empire was again proved when, without warning, they occupied Hali, a port on the Red Sea under the jurisdiction of Ghalib. Remonstrance was useless. The Wahhabis obviously meant war. They offered such terms to the Hijaz as militaristic Empires suggest to small but proud States that are in their way.

Sa'ud, in fact, the commander whose name was already execrated throughout the Shiah world, anticipated the declaration of war. He captured the summer residence of the Meccans, the pleasant town of Taif, and thence he sent his soldiers raiding in all directions. The situation for the Sharif was untenable; he had no force capable of withstanding these Puritan zealots who equated the gaining of loot with the will of Allah.

As was to happen before a similar threat a hundred years later, the ruler of Mecca retired on Jidda. In

April, 1803, Sa'ud made a bloodless entry into Mecca itself.

Then took place what might have been anticipated: the purgation of the Holy City. Mecca, in the eyes of Abdul Wahhab, was the font of all iniquitous practices. It was in Mecca that the *hajjis* had seen the holy religion defiled and debased, and from Mecca, therefore, that erroneous doctrines had been propagated throughout the world of Islam. Now should its cleansing be done.

The Ironsides in a 'Romish' Church were not more thorough than were the Wahhabis now. The worship of Allah alone should be allowed among the Faithful, and anything savouring of adoration of any mortal being, whether Abraham or Muhammad himself, should be disrupted. Tombs were destroyed. The coverings of the Kaaba were torn off. Traffic in holy things was forbidden. Places of visitation were blotted out. Of all the local ceremonies two only were allowed to endure: the Stoning of the Devil at Mina and the Kissing of the Black Stone in the Kaaba. Presumably this was because God alone was honoured by such rites.

Intoxicated with the ease of their success, the Wahhabis marched on from Mecca to the Red Sea. At Jidda, however, the history of 1925 was to be anticipated: it put up a fierce resistance. And, just as Medina was the last town in Turkish hands to surrender during the Great War, so now the second holiest city in Islam foiled the Wahhabis' attempts to capture it.

RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM

All this was in the year 1803. Towards the end of it, on November 4th, an event occurred which might have taught the Wahhabis a lesson on how the outside Islamic world was reacting to their regime of terror. For on that day, just as Abdul Aziz was acting as Imam to a mass of worshippers for the afternoon prayer, a man rushed forward, to plunge a dagger in the Imam's heart.

The assassin was a Shiah, a Persian. Two years previously he had seen the Wahhabis slaughter his children at Karbala. For reprisal he had to wait long and to plan carefully. At last, after pretending to be a Wahhabi, he created his opportunity. Abdul Aziz was dead. The Shiahs were revenged.

This fanatically consummate exponent of the doctrine of *taqiya*¹ was burned alive by the indignant Wahhabis.

Abdul Aziz, who had succeeded his father at the age of forty-four, was eighty-two² when he met his violent death. Much of the military achievement of Abdul Aziz' reign was due to the zeal of his son Sa'ud, who now succeeded him. The intensity of the Wahhabi drive in all parts of the Peninsula was not relaxed. From the northern Hijaz to Oman in the south-east the Wahhabi armies were carrying all before them. Even the terrible Pirate Coast (which was not known as the Trucial Coast until the British

¹ *Taqiya* is the doctrine by which it is held lawful for Shiahs to lie wholesale to attain an end beneficial to their religion.

² The point is not without interest in view of the vital necessity, if the present Wahhabi regime is to endure, for the King of Sa'udi Arabia, who is now (1933) about fifty-four years of age, to enjoy a long life.

had pacified it by the middle of the nineteenth century) was dominated by the Wahhabis, who bore their faith even over the waters to the islands of Bahrain, their temporary hold on which broke the record of which the ruling Khalifa family now boast, *pace* the reiterated claim of Persia to possession of the islands, of having held the place continuously since they first captured it in 1783.

All Arabia (with the exception of the Yaman, in the south-west) was now Wahhabi, either willingly or compulsorily. Whither could Sa'ud turn for fresh conquests? To such a creed as he carried, there were, logically, no geographical limits. Where, then, could the purging rod next descend?

The problem now concerned not only the Islamic peoples. It was the imperious duty of the Caliph himself, who had shown complete inability to protect the Holy Cities — though such protection was one of his primary responsibilities — to intervene. Nor was Christian Europe failing to wonder how such a convulsion would shake the East. Napoleon, with his plans on Egypt and the Middle Eastern route to India, was actively interested in this movement, and a report by the French Consul at Baghdad into the nature and significance of the Wahhabi revival still attests to this attention paid by the West.¹

¹ *Notice sur la Secte des Wahabis*, by J. B. Rousseau. Paris, 1809. See also Jean Raymond's *Mémoire sur l'origine des Wahabys sur la naissance de leur puissance et sur l'influence dont ils jouissent comme nation*. 1806. Published by the Royal Geographical Society of Egypt. 1925.

R E T R O S P E C T O F W A H H A B I S M

But while the Porte was considering the best steps to take against this fanatical foe, Sa‘ud’s inexhaustible energy took a fresh direction. In April, 1806, a lightning attack was made again on the Holy Cities of Iraq. Najaf, a walled town set like a jewel in the desert, was assaulted, though the assault failed. As compensation to the would-be looters, the neighbourhood of Baghdad was plundered and Samawa and Zubair were raided.

Far on the other side of Arabia similar things were taking place. In the same year swift raids were made by the Wahhabis as far north as Aleppo, and the horrified inhabitants of Syria hastened to make peace with the invader. But the Wahhabis, their ideas of loot and religion now thoroughly confused, came again and again. In 1810 they looted thirty-five villages of the Hauran, only two days from Damascus. The Pasha of Damascus sent an expedition against them, but it effected little. The Turks both east and west of the Syrian Desert, indeed, seemed impotent before these virile hordes.

This, then, was the position of the Ottoman Government *vis-à-vis* the Wahhabis in 1810. Expeditions based on Baghdad, on the one side, and on Damascus, on the other, had failed: these fanatical Badawin could raid almost as they pleased. There was but one solution: to attack them from the west, that is, with a force based on Egypt.

In Egypt, Muhammad Ali, the great Albanian who

I B N S A ' U D

is now rightly regarded as the real founder of Egyptian Nationalism,¹ was at first at no great pains to obey the behests of the Porte to cripple the power of these Wahhabis. The Porte, he knew, looked on him with suspicion. Might it not be one of its diabolical plans to undermine his own status in the Land of the Nile? He had enough trouble on hand with the Mamluks of Egypt, and was loth to leave the country which he was resolved to set in order.

By 1810, however, his position was secure enough for him to venture abroad in search of wider glory. He duly equipped an army, which set sail the following year under the command of his son, Tussun Bey. There were in this force about two thousand Albanians and eight hundred Turkish cavalry.

Tussun advanced first against Medina, but he could not capture it until the end of 1812. Then both Mecca and Taif fell quickly. Sa'ud, however, still held out against the invaders, and actually defeated a force, commanded now by Muhammad Ali himself, at Turaba, a place near the Najd-Hijaz border that was to become famous in Arabian history. This was in 1813. But next year Sa'ud died, and the Wahhabis soon afterwards collapsed.

Sa'ud, a mighty conqueror, had sown the whirlwind: he could not ride the storm.

Muhammad Ali hit upon the plan, which 'T. E. Lawrence' was to adopt later for a different purpose,

¹ See Dodwell's *The Founder of Modern Egypt*.

R E T R O S P E C T O F W A H H A B I S M

of winning the Badawin to his side by grants of money. Money is a thing which no Badawin can long resist, and it was largely owing to the defection of tribes that had but recently had Wahhabism imposed on them that, in the year of the battle of Waterloo, the Sa'udian forces met with a crushing defeat at Busal, near Taif.

Abdullah succeeded Sa'ud as Amir of Najd, but he could do nothing to stay the rout of his followers. Tussun Bey advanced into the Qasim, capturing Rass. The boot which the enemies of Wahhabism had been wearing was now on the other foot. Loyal tribes were loyal no longer. Abdullah opened up negotiations, and a brief peace was patched up.

But the ruler of Egypt was not likely to let matters rest here. It is a feature of this desert warfare that peace meant but a truce. War broke out again in 1815, Muhammad Ali's second son, the great general Ibrahim Pasha, now being in command of the mixed forces. Tribe after tribe — Mutair, Ataiba, Harb — deserted the cause of Riyadh and joined with the invaders, as has so often happened in the history of Arabia with successful armies.

Back, ever backwards, the Wahhabis were rolled. Town after town was captured, until finally, in 1818, Dar'iya itself, the capital of the once mighty Wahhabi Empire, was invested. There being no other course, Abdullah surrendered. Dar'iya was destroyed, never to become again a capital. Abdullah was sent to Cairo, thence to Constantinople. Muhammad passed him

I B N S A ' U D

over to the Turks with a recommendation to mercy. This notwithstanding, he was executed.

As his head rolled in the dust of the square of St. Sophia, so fell the first Wahhabi Empire.

To all appearances, Najd was now, like the Hijaz, but a province of Egypt. But although the fire of Wahhabism had been damped down, the flames had not been extinguished. For years after Abdullah had met his doom, revolts against the Egyptian overlords broke out. The garrison of Riyadh, the new capital, was massacred, and in 1821 Turki, the new Amir, drove out the invaders and was proclaimed lord of Najd, the Hasa, and Oman. This, however, was no restoration of the Wahhabi Empire; and Turki paid tribute to Egypt.

The real strength of the Wahhabis had spent itself, and with its passing went the resolve of the Sa'udi family to present a united front to the world. In the nineteenth century, in fact, there was civil war among the Sa'uds: an infallible symptom of the decline of Wahhabism. Yet there was to be a notable, if transient, resuscitation under Faisal, grandfather of the present monarch, Ibn Sa'ud.

While Turki's son, Faisal, was pacifying the Hasa in 1834, one Mishari ibn Abdur Rahman, who belonged to a collateral branch of the family, revolted against the Amir. Availing himself of Turkish support, he had Turki assassinated in Riyadh. But the lords of Riyadh have ever been expert in avenging the assassination of

RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM

their leaders. Within the space of two months, and with the aid of one Abdullah ibn Rashid,¹ Faisal, the murdered man's son, dispatched Mishari. Faisal became Amir, and Abdullah was rewarded by being made Governor of Hail.

Faisal's preoccupations and inclinations made him overlook the necessity of paying tribute to Egypt, but he was quickly reminded of his forgetfulness. A force from Egypt in 1837 compelled him to surrender, and, the better to impress his delinquencies upon his memory, the invaders removed him, a prisoner, to Cairo. Then followed a period of direct Egyptian rule in Najd, varied by rule by Sa'udis as mediatized Amirs.

But in 1843 Faisal escaped from his Cairo prison and returned to Riyadh as Amir. Thereafter he reigned successfully, imposing Wahhabi authority afresh on Oman, the Hasa, the Qasim, and the Jabal Shammar. But though his personality counted for much, he could not infuse again into the movement its original fire. On his death in 1867 even this limited restoration of Wahhabi might began to fail.

His son Abdullah was unpopular, and his brother Sa'ud had no great difficulty in deposing him in 1871, though in the fighting that was necessitated by the change the Qasim and the Jabal Shammar declared their independence — ominous signals for the disintegration of the Wahhabi power.

¹ Founder of the North Arabian dynasty, with its capital at Hail. This was the Rashid family which towered above all others, including the Sa'udis, in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The deposed Abdullah had ambition, but it was of a personal kind, and it was with no scruples that he, a member of the family which had brought the Ottoman Empire to the brink of ruin, now sought the assistance of the Turks. The Turks were only too glad of a *casus belli* against the rulers of Riyadh. Appointing Abdullah Deputy-Governor of Najd, they organized an expedition, which annexed the Hasa province in 1871.

Sa'ud could do little against the Turks, and in 1872 he sent his brother, Abdur Rahman,¹ to open negotiations with them at Baghdad. All that Abdur Rahman received for his pains was two years' imprisonment by the Turks.

Sa'ud died in 1877 and was succeeded by the Abdullah whom he had deposed three years previously. He reigned unostentatiously for eight years, after which his two nephews grew tired of his incompetence and threw him into prison. So ignominiously perished — or seemed to perish — the long line of Sa'udi Amirs at Riyadh.

Now entered upon the scene of Najd the great Arab of the later nineteenth century: Muhammad ibn Rashid of Hail. He annexed the Najd to his own dominion of Hail, released Abdullah from prison, but sent him with his brother, Abdur Rahman, and other members of the family to Hail. But in 1886 Abdullah

¹ Father of the present King of Sa'udi Arabia.

RETROSPECT OF WAHHABISM

and Abdur Rahman were allowed to return to Riyadh. There, in 1889, Abdullah died. Abdur Rahman naturally expected to become Governor of Riyadh, as agent for Ibn Rashid. But this was not in Muhammad's mind.

In June of the following year, one of those frenzies of assassination which appear peculiarly to afflict Arabia broke out. Ibn Rashid, it seems, suspected the Sa'uds of treachery. He therefore ordered the Governor of Riyadh, Salim ibn Subhan, to get them out of the way. This Governor had no very original mind. He commanded all the male members of the Sa'ud family to be present on a certain day to hear a kindly greeting from Ibn Rashid.

Of such a ruse the Sa'uds had already seen enough. They attended the levee, but no sooner had they entered the room than they showed how they meant to receive their master's greeting. They flung themselves upon the Governor and his attendants; and a Sa'udi flinging meant death.

They had saved their own lives at the expense of others. But what to do now? They were masters of Riyadh but were very far from being masters of Najd. For a few months they ruled precariously in the province of Aridh, but a clash with Muhammad ibn Rashid could not be far off. It came in January, 1891, when the Shammar tribe at a battle near Buraida crushed the forces favourable to the Sa'udi cause.

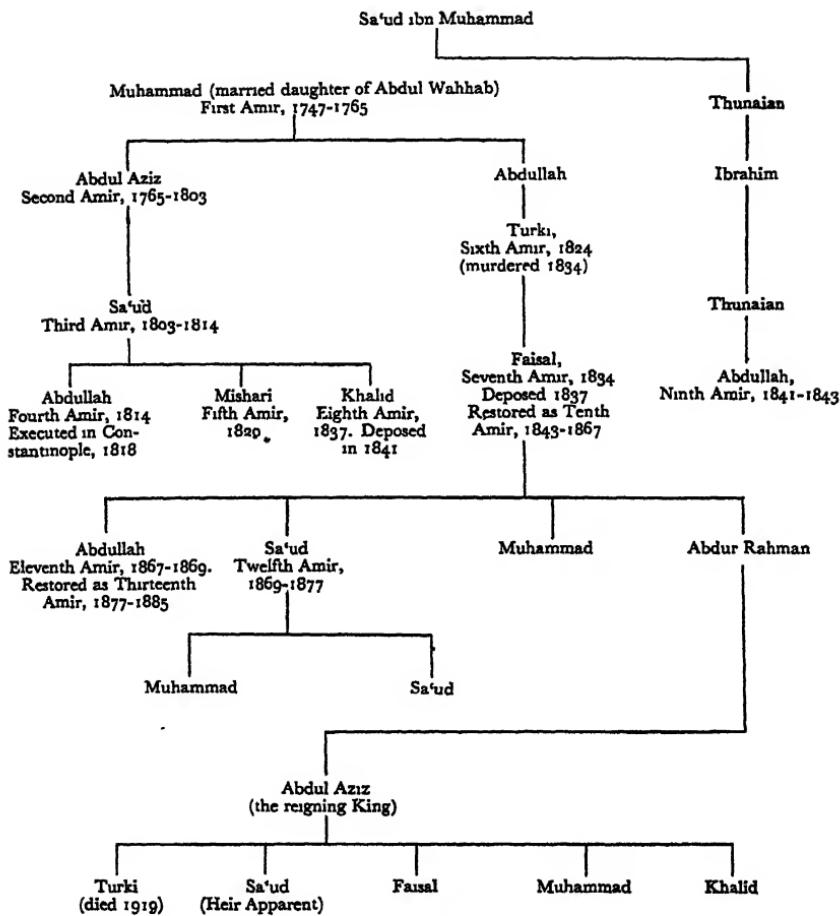
Abdur Rahman at once realized that for him there

I B N S A ' U D

was now no home in inner Arabia. He fled, together with his family, to Kuwait, as has been related in chapter i. Another branch of the family was taken as prisoner to Hail.

On such a background of religious fanaticism, military glory, rout at the hands of the invader, civil war, and, finally, disintegration at the hands of a rival Arab dynasty, is the career of King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud to be seen. A panorama, on the one hand, of a burning, purifying faith, incredible heroism, and mighty personalities, and, on the other, of loot, bigotry, and murder — in this picture of less than two hundred years is contained in miniature the whole history of Arabia, from the days of the Prophet onwards. Will stability, it may well be asked, ever be found in the Peninsula?

THE SA'UDI DYNASTY



CHAPTER IV

REVENGE IN NAJD

Extending from Riyadh — Clashes with Ibn Rashid — The 'Araif — 1902—1904

ALTHOUGH Ibn Sa'ud, as related in chapter II, had recovered the heart of the first Wahhabi Empire in a masterful way, it by no means followed that the provinces of Najd would be ready to fall like ripe plums at his behest. He had, indeed, to shake very vigorously the tree which had not known a Sa'ud for more than a decade. His father, after all, had been but a mediatised ruler in Riyadh: what guarantee had the Najdis that Ibn Sa'ud's *coup de main* was not merely a flash in the pan, that he was not a meteor which, like many others in Arabia, should burst on the horizon and disappear to be seen no more? Such a phenomenon was familiar enough in the long memories of the Badawin.

Now Najd, albeit a barren country, is divided into fairly well-defined sections; and in 1902 Ibn Sa'ud was master of but one of them: Aridh. This, however, was central and both geographically and politically the most important.

REVENGE IN NAJD

The district of Aridh was the very font of Wahhabism, and although at this date Ibn Sa'ud had no thought, or manifested no intention, of using the religious weapon, to impose his will upon his fellow-Arabs, the *locale* of his first power was to prove of utmost significance.

The nine districts or provinces of Najd are worth memorizing. They are: Aridh, Kharj (or Yamamah), Hariq-Hautah, Aflaj, Sulaiyil, Dawasir, Washm, Sudair, and the Qasim. The nodal nature of Aridh can be seen from its borders, which are, on the north, Sudair; on the east, the Dahna desert; on the south beyond Jabal Alayya, Kharj and Hariq; on the south-west, Aflaj; and on the north-west and west, Washm.

Ibn Sa'ud's first duty, patently, was to consolidate the former Sa'udi hold on Najd itself. This task was to be complicated by two factors — both Arab, for the governing Turkish Power was at this time not primarily interested in inner Arabia, having more important preoccupations in the 'civilized' lands of Northern Arabia and in the Yaman, in the south-west of the Peninsula. There was, first of all, the presence of the bitterly hostile family of Rashid, ruling from Hail to the north of Najd; and there was to be the scarcely less bitter hostility, arising out of jealousy of Ibn Sa'ud's success, of another branch of his own family which had been imprisoned at Hail at the time when he and his father's family fled as refugees to Kuwait.

At first, Abdul Aziz ibn Rashid (who had succeeded his uncle, the great Muhammad, in 1897) took scant notice of Ibn Sa'ud's stroke in taking Riyadh. He was after bigger game. Despite the dying advice of the shrewd Muhammad, he decided that Kuwait must be humbled. It was the Shaikh Mubarak who was the deadliest foe to the kingdom of Ha'il, on the main trade route to which he held a strangle-hold. Settle with Kuwait and then tackle the smaller Sa'udi fry: that was his plan. He therefore remained for some time at Hafar, doing his utmost to persuade the Turks, in collaboration with his own forces, to attack the Shaikh of Kuwait. The Turks, however, saw in such a campaign the danger of complications with the British, who had more or less taken Kuwait under their protection; and so they prudently refrained, at any rate for a time, from assisting the designs of their zealous protégé.

In the meantime, Ibn Sa'ud, rightly ignoring the schemes of Ibn Rashid against Mubarak, spent 1902 in consolidating his hold on southern Najd. After carefully refortifying his capital of Riyadh, he began the task of re-asserting Sa'udian authority in the provinces of Kharj, Aflaj, and Wadi Dawasir. This was not over-difficult, for Rashidian rule had never commended itself to, and had sat lightly upon, these southern districts. With the aid of his brother, Sa'd, who had also been at Kuwait in exile with him, Ibn Sa'ud made secure his position in the south — as,

REVENGE IN NAJD

indeed, he had to do, if he were to face complacently the attacks that would surely be launched eventually by the Rashidites from the north.

He seemed, at least, to have secured his position here, when, in the winter of 1902, Ibn Rashid, despairing of getting the slow-moving Turks to act, bethought himself of an expedition against Ibn Sa'ud. Better a fight against this young usurper than no fight at all! His aim, of course, was to recapture Riyadh. But he soon found that the repairing of the fortifications of the town had been done in too soldierly a fashion to warrant a direct assault on it. He resolved, therefore, to attack it from the rear, that is, from the south.

Manceuvring past the capital, he marched into Kharj, intending first to seize Dilam, the chief town of the province. But the desert contains few secrets: Ibn Sa'ud had heard of his enemy's plan, and was ready for him.

In the early dawn Ibn Rashid approached Dilam, imagining he was unsuspected. But soon he was undeceived. Out rang the Wahhabi rifles defiantly on the wintry air. Ibn Sa'ud, in that swift way of his which characterized many a subsequent encounter, had rushed up a force. The battle, as desert battles go, raged fiercely, with neither side gaining ground. At length, with the setting of the sun, Ibn Rashid called off his troops, returned to Sulaimiya, and thence, up Wadi Sulai', home to Hail.

For Ibn Sa'ud this sudden retirement was a mercy, for both the energy and the ammunition of his men were gone. Obviously the stars in their lucent desert courses were fighting for him. He now felt that, under the protection of Allah, he might leave his capital of Riyadh, whither he had summoned from Kuwait his father, Abdur Rahman,¹ to act as regent whenever he should be absent, and subdue the desert.

But few Arab leaders, however humiliated in conflict, sulk in their tents for long, and Ibn Rashid soon showed his mettle again by raiding the neighbourhood of Kuwait. Shaikh Mubarak was so impressed with the menace, indeed, that he called on Ibn Sa'ud for help, suggesting that the conqueror of Riyadh should join with his own son, Jabir, in a campaign against the Shammar, the mainstay of the Hail kingdom.

No prospect was pleasanter to Ibn Sa'ud. That he, rather than Ibn Rashid, should by this year of 1902 have gained the initiative was remarkable. Ibn Rashid, however, was still strong. He abandoned the attack on Kuwait and made a lightning move against Riyadh. To counter this, Ibn Sa'ud actually left his capital to make a raid on one of the most militant tribes in Arabia, the Mutair, in the Qasim. Ibn Rashid's attempt to storm Riyadh failed; but, as he withdrew, after him went Ibn Sa'ud's father, Abdur Rahman. Before Ibn Rashid could reach Washm,

¹ Died 1928.

REVENGE IN NAJD

Wahhabi flying columns had occupied the towns of Shaqra and Tharmida. Such swiftness was matched by Ibn Sa'ud himself, who now came up in support of these pioneering forces. He confirmed the capture they had effected and extended it to the whole of Sudair, except the capital, Majma'a.

One more province, Washm, was now in Ibn Sa'ud's hands. Not the acres of territory, however, but the tribes they contained were the important factor. With Washm's coming under the Wahhabi aegis, the powerful though not notoriously reliable Ataiba tribe, and the Qahtan, had to pay tribute to Ibn Sa'ud.

The next objective, obviously, was the Qasim, and in this matter Mubarak could, indirectly, help Ibn Sa'ud. For many of the men of the Qasim had fled from the Rashidites' conquest of their territory to Kuwait, and they were only too ready to intrigue for a safe return to their homes.

But, as often happens in Arabia, climatic conditions interfered with warfare. In the summer, of course, fighting is practically *tabu*: it would have to be serious war indeed for Arab combatants entirely to ignore the heat. Moreover, the rains of the spring of 1903 had been scanty, so that Central Arabia could not support an army living on the land as it moved. The winter of 1903 passed, therefore, without the possibility of a real blow at the Qasim.

Impatiently awaiting favourable conditions, Ibn

Sa'ud perceived, in March, 1904, that the omens were auspicious. Ibn Rashid had gone off to the north-east to collect more of the great Shammar tribe for what he was now beginning to see was his testing-time against the rebel Sa'uds. But Ibn Sa'ud, moving, as he always did, very rapidly, marched up to Sirr, where he routed Ibn Rashid's General, Husain ibn Jarrad. In the next month, he divided his forces, sending some troops north-eastwards to engage the Shammar, and reserving others for an assault on the Qasim.

This was a brilliant scheme. Together with the faithful friend who was with him when he first captured Riyadh, and who for more than thirty subsequent years was to serve him with incomparable devotion, Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, he captured the important town of Anaiza.

This battle was memorable, because the Rashidian representative, Majid ibn Subhan, seeing how the fight was going against him, used a method of warfare, not, indeed, unique, but one that despite Ibn Sa'ud's success here was to create considerable trouble for the Wahhabi cause later on. For the opposing General brought to Anaiza from Hail several members of the Sa'ud family who had not taken refuge in flight at the time when Abdur Rahman and his family fled to Kuwait. These Sa'udis were intended as hostages. During the fight, however, they managed to escape from their captors, and were welcomed warmly by

REVENGE IN NAJD

Ibn Sa'ud. From the circumstances of their recognition, these erstwhile hostages henceforth bore in Arabia the nickname of *Al Araif*¹—‘lost property recovered.’

The conquest of Anaiza led almost inevitably to that of Buraida, which surrendered to the Wahhabis in June, 1904. How remote must have seemed the possibility to Doughty, who knew well, and suffered much in, these towns, that, within less than half a century of his visiting them, they should slip out of the hands of the reigning dynasty at Hail!

Already, however, Ibn Sa'ud was virtual master of Najd, and though the might of Hail was still to impress many travellers, particularly European travellers, whose ideas upon Wahhabism were, not unnaturally, derived solely from the cruelly fanatical and transient Wahhabism of the previous century, it is easy to see now that it was the wild, though gallant enough, careering about the desert of Abdul Aziz ibn Rashid, together with his complete lack of the statesmanship that characterized his uncle, the unforgotten Muhammad ibn Rashid, which heralded the bankruptcy and the impending doom of the Hail State.

True, that doom was to be delayed for some seventeen years, but the Wahhabis had now, in 1904, so eaten into the crust of the former Hail State that,

¹ Thus Philby in *Arabia*, page 177. Others, however, and Philby himself in *The Heart of Arabia*, Vol. I, page 102, attribute the recovery of *Al Araif* to the later battle of Raudhat al Muhanna, at which, in 1906, Ibn Rashid was killed.

I B N S A ' U D

unless the Turkish *chefs* could furnish it with new flour for pastry, the pie would surely disappear. And such provisioning, though attempted, was, as will be seen, just beyond the resources of the Ottomans.

Up to this moment Ibn Sa'ud had been actuated by motives of personal revenge on the rulers of Hail, the conquerors of his ancestors' home at Riyadh. His fighting personality alone had been used to carry with him the Najdi tribes. There had been no appeal whatever to religion — Wahhabism as a welding and spurring factor had scarcely been thought of — still less to any imperialistic idea.

The religious-political *motif* was to emerge later. *

CHAPTER V

HUMBLING THE TURK

Battle of Bukairiya — The Ottomans' Discomfiture — Turks' Abandonment of Najd — Death of Ibn Rashid — 1904 — 1906

HAVING almost expelled Ibn Rashid from the confines of Najd, Ibn Sa'ud could now devote his attention to two things — or so he thought: the consolidation and reform of the territory actually under his control, and the regularization, in the eyes of interested parties, of his position in Arabia. There is evidence that already in his mind he was turning over ideas of settling the Badawin (as they had never before been settled in Najd) in agricultural colonies — ideas which, even before the Great War, he was to put into practice. Certainly he perceived that, could he add nothing of statecraft to what his ancestors of the first Wahhabi Empire had manifested, his State was likely in its turn to suffer disintegration. The restoration of his House's honour was one thing, its preservation, another.

Before reform, however, was to come much more fighting. Of the two, the Badawin, unsuspecting of

his half-formed aim of transforming or at any rate modifying their character, doubtless preferred the latter: it was, after all, at least in the form of the tribal raid, the *ghazzu*, their traditional pastime.

Internationally, the only two Powers that mattered to Ibn Sa'ud were the Ottoman Government, which still nominally was master of the Arabian Peninsula, and the British Government, which, though it had no hold and little influence on inner Arabia, had built up a very strong position in the Persian Gulf, with all the Arab chieftains of which it was in close treaty relations, or at least on very cordial terms.

It is tempting here to assume that Ibn Sa'ud, who in subsequent years ejected the Turks from that part of the Peninsula wherein he had influence and became a loyal friend of the British — the ejectors, with the Sharifian Arabs, of the Turks elsewhere in the Peninsula — resolved at this early stage in his career that he would wage unceasing warfare against the Ottoman Power, the undisguised aider and abettor of his chief rival, Ibn Rashid. But there is insufficient ground for such an assumption, which is probably quite false. Ibn Sa'ud's ideas were as yet local, confined practically to inner Arabia, and did not envisage a complete renunciation by the Ottoman Power of its Arabian provinces. It is patent, however, that he studied carefully the way in which the British fashioned their relations with Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait, as well as with other Gulf chieftains, and he may

HUMBLING THE TURK

well have thought that the 'Nasranis' were the more skilful negotiators, though obviously they could do little to strengthen his position in Najd.

Not for Ibn Sa'ud, therefore, was it to pick a quarrel with the Turks: enough to concentrate on setting in order the State which revenge on the Rashidis had moulded and fate had put into his hands.

Yet the quarrel came without further provocation. The Turks, who a year or two previously were unready to help Ibn Rashid against Mubarak of Kuwait (who would surely have been supported by British sea-power) were now, in 1904, willing to aid the friendly Shammar of Hail against the usurper of Riyadh; for, in their view, seeing that Ibn Sa'ud campaigned with the connivance of Kuwait, he must be anti-Ottoman.

Between the capture by Ibn Sa'ud of Buraida and his capture of Anaiza, between the months, that is to say, of April and June, eight Turkish battalions, under a redoubtable commander, Ahmad Fevzi Pasha, set out across the eastern desert to engage Ibn Sa'ud in the Qasim. Joined by the Shammar of Ibn Rashid, they marched confidently on, burning though the desert heat became.

Ibn Sa'ud, realizing that here opposed to him was not merely a Badawin force but a disciplined army, equipped with modern artillery, chose his ground with unusual care. He selected a spot near the sand-dunes of Bukairiya. Battle broke on June 15th.

No surprise was possible. Greek was meeting

Greek. Quite easily the end of Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud, whose triumphs so far had, after all, been but against nomad Arabs, might come now. To and fro the fight swayed, the Turks at once calm, brave, though stupid, the followers of Sa'ud, desperate, wild-eyed, comparatively ill-equipped.

Against such foes success for Ibn Sa'ud was unattainable. Men fell in their scores, in their fifties, in their hundreds. Ibn Sa'ud himself was wounded in the hand. Finally, having lost a thousand men (the mixed force opposed to him had lost a similar number)¹ the troops of Ibn Sa'ud retreated, and the Turks marched on to occupy their vacated tents.

In the meantime, however, certain Wahhabi contingents from the Qasim had charged and routed the Shammar encampment. But, on hearing that Ibn Sa'ud, their idol, had fled, they perforce retired also.

The day was with the invading armies. But Ibn Sa'ud was not done with yet: in desert battles defeated forces rarely are. The Turks, leaving their camp and commissariat at Bukairiya, went on to the pleasanter oases round the town of Rass. Like a flash the Wahhabi leader was on these supplies, the capture of which put fresh heart into his depressed followers. Then he rushed up to protect Rass. This time it was the Turks who chose the site of battle — near Shinana.

But neither the side that had won so hard a fight at

¹ Contrast this with the Wahhabi fighting of the eighteenth century. In thirty years (1744–1774) of scarcely interrupted warfare, the Wahhabis lost in killed but 1,700 men, and their opponents but 2,300.

HUMBLING THE TURK

Bukairiya nor that which had lost was willing to take any risk. For day after day, week after week, the armies glared at each other. Three months thus passed. The heat grew stifling, the Turkish bombardments nerve-racking. Finally, cholera broke out among the Wahhabis, and there were murmurings of would-be mutineers. Not even the ire of Ibn Sa'ud himself could stay the harsh objurgations of his men and their threat to desert.

Pocketing his pride, Ibn Sa'ud sounded the ground for peace. Ibn Rashid laughed him to scorn. Stalemate — unless indeed, the Wahhabis were to mutiny — seemed inevitable.

But release came by means of one of the oldest habits of the Badawin: their custom of taking their beasts at stated times to pasture. It was the Shammar of Ibn Rashid who insisted on breaking off the battle for the purpose of making the long trek back to their favourite grounds in the north-east.

This was exactly the kind of release which Ibn Sa'ud could most have desired. His men were totally unsuited for any kind of war of attrition. Quick triumph and rich booty or quick defeat and a speedy retirement or death — that was what they prayed for. It was, in short, the Arab mode of warfare.

As autumn came on the Turks and what remained of Ibn Rashid's forces moved to the north-west of Rass. Before they could select a position, however, Ibn Sa'ud's cavalry were on them. They were obliged

I B N S A ' U D

to turn and fight. At first the Wahhabis could make no impression, but, flanking movements having failed, Ibn Sa'ud himself led a charge at the heart of the enemy. It was seemingly a hopeless gesture; but fortune was with him. The sight of their giant leader storming the foe put irresistible courage into the Wahhabis. The Turks, enervated by the summer heat and the lack of elementary necessities, retired; whereupon the more temperamental troops of Ibn Rashid broke.

Joy and gratitude now shone in Ibn Sa'ud's face, but for his followers it was the rich booty that mattered. Loot, loot such as they had not seen for many a day, perhaps never before, now was theirs. Guns and baggage and food, and, above all, gold for the Turkish troops — these were what delighted Najdi eyes; and these it was that made impossible any immediate following-up of the surprising success.

Pitiful was this September day for the Turkish soldiers, representatives of the Caliph-Sultan Abdul Hamid. Some surrendered to the Wahhabis; others found their way back to the friendly Shammar; many died of thirst and hunger. After a futile attempt at negotiation, the Turks, much more seriously pressed in the Yaman, where the Imam Yahya was asserting his independence, decided to call a plague on both these Houses of inner Arabia, and withdrew.

Not yet, however, was the Ottoman Power out of Ibn Sa'ud's way. The Wahhabi leader had been

HUMBLING THE TURK

fighting, not for his independence of the ruling Power in Arabia, but for the felling of the power of Haïl that had been raised against him. It is important not to antedate the impetus which he gave to the Arab Nationalist movement for freedom of the Turk.

But this withdrawal of the Turk did involve the virtual, though not the immediate, disappearance of the Haïl State. Ibn Sa'ud manœuvred for some eighteen months to gain popular support in the vital province of the Qasim. During this period he discovered regretfully — for he had much admired Shaikh Mubarak, who had first given him asylum from the Rashids — the existence of some pact between Haïl and Kuwait. He perceived that a final blow should be delayed no longer. Ibn Rashid was not at this time wishing for a major engagement; he preferred a sort of guerilla warfare. But his hand was forced by Ibn Sa'ud.

At a place called Raudhat al Muhanna, not far from Buraida, the Wahhabis plunged at the foe. At their furious onslaught the Shammar of Ibn Rashid were confused; nor could they be rallied by their Amir, who in trying bravely to turn them back fell fatally wounded. His efforts had been noted by several Wahhabi marksmen, none of whom missed the honour of dispatching their own chief's hated rival.

So passed Ibn Rashid; and the succession for the House of Haïl became a mere scramble between several unworthy candidates. The history of Arabia holds many such tales.

CHAPTER VI

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

The Qasim wrested from Ibn Rashid — First brush with the Hijaz — The 'Araif Revolt — 1906 — 1912

THE ruining of a once mighty House in Arabia is rarely followed immediately by an access of general loyalty towards the razer, and although the Rashids of Hail now began an orgy of mutual assassination, the various tribes hitherto dependent upon or at least respectful towards them did not decide forthwith to throw in their lot with the new Wahhabi force. Far from it: the fall of Hail was, in their view, an opportunity for fresh loot and intrigue.

The Harb, for instance, would raid the Shammar; the Mutair, than which there was no greedier or more fanatical tribe, would intrigue with the Turks. Ibn Sa'ud would doubtless have liked at once to annex the Qasim and to incorporate Hail into his domain, but he lacked the military strength to do so. He could launch no mighty campaign, and had to content himself with small, localized effort.

First, however, he regularized his position *vis-à-vis* the Turks. The Ottoman Power, worsted in battle

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

against the Wahhabis, sought to smooth over the position as between Hail and Riyadh by suggesting that the buffer province of the Qasim should be under their control. It was a solution more palatable to the discomfited Rashids than to the Wahhabis. Ibn Sa'ud's firmness, in face of this proposal, impressed the Porte, and the upshot was that with expressions of mutual goodwill between Sultan Abdul Hamid and Ibn Sa'ud the Turks renounced their endeavour to get a footing in Najd. They remained only in the Hasa province to the east of Najd.

During the few years following 1906 the House of Hail sank very low. The dagger, poison, bribery — there was not an artifice known to usurpers in Arabia which was not used by those who wished to gain the throne that Muhammad ibn Rashid had in the nineteenth century made famous throughout the land. It continued to exist only by virtue of its 'loyalty' to the Turkish cause.

Thus rid of the Ottomans, and with nothing to fear from the Rashids, Ibn Sa'ud could look inside rather than outside his boundaries. Here, and particularly in the Qasim, there was plenty to do. In this province the Wahhabi cause had had its ups and downs; parts of it were still faithful to Hail, and the Mutair tribe at first preferred intrigue with outsiders to dependence on Riyadh. But in 1907 Ibn Sa'ud decided that this troubled state could no longer endure.

Near the now historic battle-ground of Tarafiya he raided the Mutair. In this fight of April, 1907, his horse stumbled and Ibn Sa'ud suffered a broken collar-bone. Within less than a year afterwards he had humbled the stubborn town of Buraida, and had set the stamp of Wahhabi authority irrevocably on the Qasim by appointing Abdullah ibn Jiluwi¹ as its Governor-General.

The subjugation of the Qasim was a capital measure. Seen at this distance of time, it was inevitable and inexorable. But equally unsurprising was the rebellion which was planned in 1910 against Ibn Sa'ud. This was fostered by two agencies: the '*Araif*' branch of the royal House (which Ibn Sa'ud had rescued from the grip of Ha'il), and the fact that severe drought in Najd had produced discontent.

The second was a factor that has often been like dry bracken to the match of any jealous and proud shaikh. But despite their intrigues in the southern provinces and with the eastern tribes, the '*Araif*' could achieve little. They spent their time trying to arouse the Hariq against Ibn Sa'ud and the Ajman to revolt against their unpopular overlord.

The Wahhabi leader at once marched against Hariq and captured the Hazzani ringleaders. But the lack of sustenance, which led, as it frequently does lead, to the death of many beasts, prohibited him from making any conspicuous movement against his foes.

¹ See pages 25 and 28.

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

At this time, however, events in the Hijaz, as well as in Central Arabia, provoked the keen attention of Ibn Sa‘ud. Had he at this stage in his career been inclined to any self-satisfaction or personal pride — and it is a demonstrable fact that he was not — it would have received a severe rebuff.

For many years the Holy Land of Islam had been held by nominees of the Turkish Government who failed to protect the interests of the *hajjis*, the pilgrims. So disloyal both to the Ottoman Government and to the cause of Islam had these successive Sharifs of Mecca become, in fact, and so lawless the Hijaz tribes, that it was largely with a strategic purpose, to the better administration of the land, that Sultan Abdul Hamid, having collected subscriptions from the Faithful all over the world, gave orders, in 1901, for the construction of the famous Pilgrim Railway from Damascus to Mecca. In 1904 work was begun under the direction of the German engineer, Meissner Pasha. By 1908 Medina had been linked with Damascus. But further than Medina the Hijazis would not allow this pilgrim track to go. And Medina to this day remains the terminus.

The Sublime Porte perceived that it must change the character of its representatives at Mecca. In 1908, therefore, Husain ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Aun was chosen to be Amir. This was the man, then sixty years of age, who, over twenty years later, was to die an exiled king in Transjordan.

I B N S A ' U D

This Amir Husain at once manifested his loyalty to the Porte. Having imposed his authority on the Badawin, he obtained his chance to receive real Turkish gratitude in 1911. In that year the Turks were engaged in the Tripolitan War, and when the Idrisi of Asir took advantage of the Ottomans' pre-occupations to strike a blow for Arab independence it was Husain who was able to check him. He performed this task so well, in fact, that the Turks imagined — perhaps they were led by Husain to imagine — that through this new Amir they might recover their lost prestige in Central Arabia.

Whatever the motive, in 1912 Husain, supported by the Turks, marched into Najd, where, quite by accident, he captured S'ad, the brother of Ibn Sa'ud who was about to collect from the Ataiba tribe reinforcements to deal with the trouble in the southern provinces. The Sharif had no intention then of demolishing the Wahhabi State, but it is sufficiently obvious, from the fact of his suggesting to Ibn Rashid a diversion against Ibn Sa'ud in the north, that he was resolved to impress on all Central Arabia that he was the greatest Arab in the Peninsula.

By reason of the fact that S'ad, whom he greatly loved, was a hostage with Husain, and of the lack of resources, both in men and beasts, that I have already mentioned, the Wahhabi ruler could offer no resistance to the terms which the new agent of the Turks laid down.

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

Ibn Sa'ud has never hesitated, when vital interests were involved, to pocket his pride. Few leaders have taken more personal risks, when no other way of attaining ends existed, but he has none of the quixotic temperament which imperils essentials for the sake of a barren prestige. In small and great matters alike Ibn Sa'ud has always been a realist.

So it was that, seeing that Husain now had, so to speak, all the cards in his hand, Ibn Sa'ud, though it must have galled to do it, accepted the conditions of the Sharif. These were: acknowledgment of Turkish sovereignty over the Qasim, payment of an annual tribute of 6000 majidies (£1000) on account of the Qasim, and the release of his brother, S'ad.

Husain went back to Mecca well satisfied, and little reckoning that he had prevailed over an enemy who was one day to unseat him. Ibn Sa'ud wasted no time in futile regret at his partial humiliation. Instead, he resolved to clean up the position which his own relations, the '*Araif* pretenders, had created in Hariq. Again showing that rapidity of movement which has ever been his capital asset in desert battle, he took the rebels almost by surprise. Resistance was scanty. The seditionists fled, but many were captured. Most of the '*Araif*, however, managed to escape. They sought refuge in Mecca, where the Sharif Husain, welcoming them, accounted them to be potentially useful in any schemes which he might one day launch in Arabia.

But for the Hazzani leaders, who had been pardoned only a few months previously, there was this time to be no mercy. These traitors were executed without delay. Ibn Sa'ud has a distinguished record of clemency, in startling contrast with other great names in Arabian history, but at this crisis in his life, in 1912, he preferred the more traditional Arab mode. It is a mode which even now has perforce to be followed in certain parts of his vast kingdom. Mercy in Arabia is sometimes misunderstood, sternness, never.

The effect of these executions was most salutary. Najdis now realized that Ibn Sa'ud was indeed their master, that against him no rebel had a chance. Fatalists to a man, they henceforth identified their cause with his — for a time, at any rate; and Ibn Sa'ud took care that their confidence should be neither misplaced nor abused.

Having purged the body politic, Ibn Sa'ud could now turn with calmer eye to the maladies which were afflicting the tribes outside his own frontiers. His kingdom had been assailed both from without and from within: it had withstood all shocks. Now, therefore, was the time to show to the world whether he had anything of originality, or whether he was simply the old-fashioned type of brave but unthinking Arab tyrant.

Ibn Sa'ud was now feeling in his system the fire of religious zeal and in his veins the sap of imperialistic ambitions. These two forces were to co-exist while he

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

climbed the ladder of fame by three epoch-making stages — the expulsion of the Turks from the Hasa in 1913, the incorporation of the Hail kingdom in 1921, and the annexation of the Hijaz in 1924–1925. Quite deliberately these two causes, religious and political, were fostered and proclaimed by Ibn Sa‘ud. He was to be both *Imam* and *Malik*.

This year of 1912 was the sign-post of his life. He then left behind him the route of mere personal aggrandizement that has led so many Arab monarchs to ruin and oblivion. He then began that series of constructive reforms which demarcate him from all his predecessors.

CHAPTER VII

A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS

Revival of Wahhabism — Religion as a Weapon — The 'Ikhwan' — Settling the Badawin — 1912

DESPITE the constant action in which Ibn Sa'ud had been obliged up to this stage in his career to indulge, he had not lacked time for reflection. As I have said, the appeal which he made to men was a Sa'udi appeal, the call of his own strong personality. It is a call, this ducal lead, which has never failed in Arabia, but, for the very reason that it is personal, it has little durability. Ibn Sa'ud was aware of this: he understood that he must, if his regime were to survive, found what had hitherto been foreign to the Arabian genius — a system.

He now realized that he had awakened forces among the Badawin which, if he could not control them and divert them into progressive channels, would inevitably expend themselves in anarchic lust for power and loot. He resolved, therefore, on a triple transformation of the Badawin character: he would change their religious background, their political background, and, above all, their economic background. The last,

A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS

from geographical or physical causes alone, was incomparably the most difficult.

From time to time waves of religious fire have swept over Arabia, and always they have been of a reforming kind. First, of course, there was the emergence of Muhammad himself, which cleansed the Peninsula of polytheism and idolatry. Afterwards came the Carmathian movement, which lasted from the ninth to the twelfth century A.D. This was inspired by a sort of 'Fundamentalist' emotion. Social reform, in the view of the founders of the movement in Mesopotamia, was to be attained by the enforcement of equality; but as applied by the zealots who arose in the tenth century in the Hasa province, east of Najd, the Carmathian doctrine was equated with the purgation of Islam. In 930 A.D. these Puritans from Eastern Arabia not only laid waste Mesopotamia but also conquered Western Arabia, and actually carried off from Mecca the famous Black Stone of the Kaaba.

But the Carmathians are now only a memory. The dust of the desert has swirled in storms, and many fiery particles have been borne to outside lands, but when the storm has subsided, all is much as before.
Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe.

The next purging outbreak was that of the eighteenth-century Wahhabis, whose career has been sketched in chapter III. It may be convenient here to mention some of the points in which the Wahhabis

differed from the practices and beliefs of most other Muslims.

First of all was their absolute insistence that Allah alone was to be worshipped. Other Muslims sometimes suggested that the Prophet had not died as other mortals and that he could intercede with God on behalf of the Faithful. The Wahhabis set their faces dead against this, declaring that Muhammad was a man like unto themselves, and that he had died just as all other mortals had died.

Secondly, whereas some Muslims mention the Prophet's name in prayer, the Wahhabis permitted only God's name so to be mentioned.

Thirdly — though this point has little significance, seeing that there is now no generally-recognized Caliph in Islam — the Wahhabis denied, what was sometimes pretended, that the Caliph had spiritual authority.

Fourthly, the Wahhabis proclaimed inexorable hostility to the worship of saints — a practice very prevalent among non-Arab Muslims and then existing even in Najd itself. Arising from this prohibition was the Wahhabis' demolition of tombs in the Holy Places and elsewhere: they allowed neither illumination of shrines nor prostration before tombs.

Fifthly, whereas many Muslims celebrated seven feasts, the Wahhabis declared only two¹ festivals to be legal.

¹ The *Id al Fitr* and the *Id al Adha*.

A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS

There were also other less important differences in the doctrines as enunciated by the Wahhabis and as practised by the *mushraqin*—as the non-Wahhabi Muslims were called. They can all be summed up, however, in the Wahhabis' insistence on self-reliance and on the suppression of hagiology and of appeal to those buried in tombs.

But apart from doctrine there were sharp demarcations in practice. The Wahhabis, though refusing to recognize Muhammad as more than a man, paid great heed to what the Prophet said in the Quran and elsewhere. For instance, Muhammad's sumptuary laws in respect of the wearing of silk and of gold, shaving the beard, and the use of wine, alcohol, tobacco, gambling and magic were rigidly insisted upon by the Wahhabis. They were commonly disregarded by other Muslims.

It follows from this brief catalogue that the Wahhabis' most hated enemies were, not the infidels or complete Unbelievers, but the Muslims, either Sunni or Shiah, who had fallen away from the path revealed to them by the Prophet. These Najdis declared, indeed, that the Christians and Jews were 'People of a Book', and therefore to be tolerated; but against those Muslims who professed to be 'resigned to the Will of Allah' and in fact were not, they determined to wage unceasing war.

These Puritan beliefs, as I say, had fired the Arabian deserts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries;

I B N S A ' U D

the flames swept onwards as in a heath-fire. But when the Egyptian beaters put it out, little remained, even in Najd, but the charred memories. In religion, however, as in everything else, there is no half-way house between toleration and absolute extermination. The Wahhabi faith in Arabia was prosecuted and persecuted, but never quite eliminated.

Now Ibn Sa'ud was very well aware of the passions which this simple faith had aroused in his forbears; he knew that death itself meant little to the Wahhabi who was fighting a Holy War against the backsliders. But he was also aware that this spirit of fanaticism could be, and indeed had been, misused. In moderation and under supervision it could be invaluable to a general, but let it outrun itself, and it would die, as it had almost died at the end of the nineteenth century, for lack of breath and of possible objective. If the burning virtues of Wahhabism were to be preserved, then, the faith would have to be placed, so to say, in leading strings.

The truth is that the Badawin had never been really converted to Wahhabism. When the Sa'udi cause was winning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they adhered readily enough to the Wahhabi cry; but when prospects of loot vanished, when invaders offered them gold, they at once deserted their former masters. In the nineteenth century many an Arab tribe fought, now for the Wahhabis, now for the Turks, now for the Egyptians, and now for the Rashi-

A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS

dites of Hail. Booty, in short, was their one object: of real loyalty or religion they had none.

But why not, Ibn Sa'ud argued to himself, teach them loyalty and religion?

How at once to revive this religious ardour and to canalize it into profitable channels? That was the problem to which, about this year 1912, he seriously addressed himself. There was, he decided, no solution except by an economic-religious measure.

That measure was the establishment of the now famous *Ikhwan* movement. These *Ikhwan*, or Brethren (*Akhu* = brother) were picked men sworn to serve Ibn Sa'ud loyally and to devote their lives, when not in his direct service, to the cultivation of some desert spot which had been selected by the Riyadh Government. In many places in Najd men were taken from the tribes in order that they should become loyal and dependable soldiers of Ibn Sa'ud, develop into colonizers of these agricultural settlements, and imbibe from itinerant preachers the true Wahhabi faith.

This was a departure in policy of capital, probably crucial, importance. In former centuries the Wahhabi doctrines had really been explained only to the town-dwellers, at any rate, to the settled folk. Naturally, the Badawin had tacked themselves on to the successful Sa'udis, but they were never exponents of the real Wahhabi creed, though it was mainly they whose excesses gave suffering neighbours their notions of Wahhabism.

I B N S A ' U D

Ibn Sa'ud saw that, since the tribes were to be the human backbone of his State, they must, on the one hand, be tied to the soil, and, on the other, be taught correct religion. Their nomadic habits must be mended by the inculcation of some morality, which would prevent them from for ever being liable to raid their neighbours: from this fatal custom they must be weaned at all costs.

Wherever, therefore, there was a suitable spring, Ibn Sa'ud created an agricultural centre, and to every village thus formed he sent a shaikh — a *mutawwa*, or Wahhabi missionary preacher — to instruct the new colonists, not only in the life of the Prophet and other Prophets, but also in the fundamentals of theology and good conduct and in writing and reading. The aim was to produce a village that was at once a military cantonment, an agricultural settlement, and a home of the pure Wahhabi faith.

Ibn Sa'ud, in laying down this new policy, was in effect making a joint attack on Nature and human habit. Najd had for centuries been a barren country, mainly for lack of water. Its tribes have therefore been obliged to move from place to place in search of pasture. This economic necessity of being either nomadic or pastoral has inevitably bred in them the habit of raiding, the *ghazzu*. Inter-tribal raiding has been called the national sport of Arabia, and it is true that, although the Prophet Muhammad for a time stopped it — there was in any case little point in

A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS

the tribes' raiding each other when richer booty lay beyond the confines of Arabia — it has for centuries been one of the chief obstacles to Arabian progress. But Ibn Sa'ud perceived that, sooner or later, this raiding custom must involve disintegration of the State; moreover, what he needed for the conservation of his realm was, what no previous ruler in Arabia had commanded, a standing army.

With very shrewd appreciation of the Badawin character, he resolved to unlock, so to speak, the problem by a double turn of the key: he would settle the tribesmen on the land, and he would then supply religious reasons why they should adhere to it.

At a place called Artawiya he made what, however the future of Arabia may develop, will certainly be regarded as a stroke of the highest courage and astuteness. In 1912 it was but a desert well, frequented mainly by the warlike Mutair tribe: to-day its inhabitants number over 10,000. Ibn Sa'ud has pursued unswervingly this policy of settling *Ikhwan* in colonies: there are now about a hundred of such colonies scattered in various parts of the desert.

Ibn Sa'ud's initial step was very characteristic. He persuaded the *Ikhwan* — if, indeed, they needed any persuading — to raid the more backward members of their former tribes. The superior arms of the *Ikhwan*, with which they had been provided by Ibn Sa'ud, put the remnants of the tribes at their mercy. But before anarchic vengeance could be sworn, Ibn

Sa'ud stepped in, to reconcile new convert with old backslider. The *Ikhwan* were gratified, the tribesmen not dimayed — rather were they inclined to join the *Ikhwan*, who were brothers only to similar *Ikhwan* elsewhere in the Sa'udi territories.

None but a man of infinite genius and courage in handling the Badawin could have conceived and executed so far-reaching a policy.

By this means Ibn Sa'ud provided himself with contingents of a standing army and strove to undermine the old tribal spirit. To the *Ikhwan* colonists his generosity was, both by temperament and by policy, unstinting. He armed them, gave them building materials and equipment for digging wells, and generally helped them to make the desert green and reliable pasture or arable. If he could so mould the thoughts of these men as to make them think of themselves no longer as Mutairi, or Dawasiri, or Ataiba, but simply *Ikhwan*, he would surely have accomplished what no one since the days of the Prophet himself had achieved.

More will be written in a later chapter of this *Ikhwan* movement and the spread of agricultural colonies. But it may be noted here that already, in 1912, the subjects of Ibn Sa'ud were capable of being divided into three distinct categories. These were: the townsfolk or villagers, who had been Wahhabi from birth, the *Ikhwan*, the fanatical Wahhabi warriors, the spearhead of Ibn Sa'ud's future military might and

A SYSTEM OUT OF CHAOS

the means of his modifying the tribal spirit, and finally, the Badawin, who might profess Wahhabism but were not overstrict in its tenets.

It is the *Ikhwan* who have become the backbone of the administration of King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud. They are, as anyone familiar with the history of such bodies as the Praetorian Guards at Rome or the Janissaries of the Ottoman Sultans must recall, a double-edged weapon. Nor has Ibn Sa'ud failed to feel one edge against him. But of that, more later.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONQUEST OF THE HASA

Expelling the Turks from the Hasa — Recognition by the Ottoman Government — Relations with the British — 1912—1914

At which precise point Ibn Sa'ud determined finally to break with the Ottoman Power is uncertain; some observers state that it antedated the Great War, some that even during the world-struggle, which resulted, with but a modicum of Arab assistance, in the freeing of the Peninsula from the Turkish yoke, the ruler of the Wahhabis sought to keep on friendly terms with the nominally governing Power, though he was bitterly hostile to the main Arab protégés of the Turk, the Rashids of Hail. The balance of evidence suggests that during the War he feared the victory of the Central Powers and the return of the Turk to Mesopotamia, and that he did not at an early date decide irrevocably on breaking with the Ottoman Government.

However that may be, it is patent that in the year before the War the Turks themselves harboured towards the Amirate of Najd no very cordial senti-

THE CONQUEST OF THE HASA

ments. They intrigued with parties loyal to them — Sharif Husain in the Hijaz, the Ajman tribe in the east of Najd, the Rashids of Hail, and so on — to provoke a quarrel with Ibn Sa‘ud. The object of the Ottomans appears to have been, not so much to ‘divide and rule’ — for they had renounced all intention of mastering Central Arabia — as, by means of their hold on the maritime portions of the Peninsula, to prevent any one chieftain in the interior from gaining too prominent a position. Seeing that they could make no direct assault on Ibn Sa‘ud, they would hem him in and pin-prick him.

Thus penned up, Ibn Sa‘ud cast a swift glance at where best to burst the cordon. Should he march against Mecca, or against Hail? Or should he seek open water to his eastward?

In the spring of 1913 he was camping near Tuwaiq, engaged on a raid on the Murra, that southern tribe which had not yet enrolled under his banner.

Quite suddenly he decided to trek eastwards, to the Hasa, where, ever since 1871, when Midhat Pasha conquered it from the forbears of Ibn Sa‘ud, the Turks had ruled uninterruptedly and without much opposition — although, in recent years, their rule had been inefficient, so that the Badawin had grown lawless.

Driving his camel-caravans ever faster and faster — so that no messenger possibly apprised of his intentions should precede him with news of the impending attack (a favourite precaution of Ibn Sa‘ud) — he

I B N S A ' U D

halted near the town of Hufuf. He had done a journey of five days in but a day and a half.

It was a long and terrible march for his six hundred men; some fell out, some fell sick. But those who went onward with him are never weary of narrating the military exploit that was to follow.

From friendly agents within the town Ibn Sa'ud had previously learned how the Turks had arranged their forces. Inside the walls were two regiments of Turkish soldiers, happy and confident that no Bedouin would dare attack such a place. Actually a British officer, Captain Leachman, had seen the Turks in this fortress at the end of 1912: he has recorded their debonair and easy attitude.

As in his first conquest of Riyadh, Ibn Sa'ud waited for the sun to set, for twilight, and finally for the dark.

But how to scale the walls? Ibn Sa'ud had bethought himself of an old Arab trick. Cutting down a few palm trees, he had them converted into scaling-ladders.

The desperate force, equipped with these rough steps, crept forward, still unsuspected by the Turks. Beneath the walls of the Kut fortress, Ibn Sa'ud trisected his following. Stealing up to the unwary sentries, scouts of these three sections deftly knived the guardians of Ottoman might. That accomplished, the rest soon swarmed over the walls, and, before the sleep-sodden soldiers could prepare themselves, the Wahhabis had made themselves masters of the citadel.

THE CONQUEST OF THE HASA

From every turret it was proclaimed that Ibn Sa'ud now ruled in the town. But he was taking no chances of possible treachery. Finding that a large part of the garrison and the civil officials and their families had sought refuge in the great mosque, he laid a mine under it.

'Surrender', he said to the local *Mutassarif*, or Governor, 'else the mosque and its occupants become as dust of the desert.'

In face of such realism the *Mutassarif* delayed not an instant. He gave the order for evacuation. The port of Uqair and the Qatif peninsula soon followed this lead of Hufuf. The whole province acknowledged the new master.

Armed, but still marvelling at the audacity of this desert Arab chief, the Turkish soldiers marched away to the coast. Not a shot had been fired: Turkish authority had simply melted away. Humiliated but not unhappy, the Turks took to their boats. They were — who knows? — the last non-Arab soldiers ever to be seen in this province of Al Hasa.

Thus the Sa'udi House became repossessed of territory which the Ottomans had taken from them in their decline nearly half a century previously; and for the first time in his life Ibn Sa'ud had, as one of the boundaries of his State, the sea. This fact brought him into immediate contact with the British, a contact which, though it was to have its ups and downs, has been of infinite value to him. Without British good-

will, indeed, Wahhabi Arabia would not be what it is to-day.

This capture of the Hasa is simple enough in the telling, but its significance was rightly apprised in Arabia, where it was soon recounted at every camp-fire. Here was a man, said the Badawin, who could attack and humiliate a purely Turkish force, a force, moreover, not worn out by long marching or deprivations or exposure to the Arabian sun, but one in good fettle, well-equipped, confident. Surely this Wahhabi must be a real leader, one blessed of Allah. Thus spoke the Badawin. What would have happened in Arabia had not the Great War broken out in the following year is a matter for conjecture: personally I think that the Wahhabis' successes would have come earlier than they did, for during the four war years Ibn Sa'ud was virtually 'bottled up' or bound down by engagements to be able to do much more than hold on to what he had conquered in the pre-War years.

However that may be, it was a stage of the utmost importance that he now reached of establishing direct touch with the British in the Persian Gulf. The Government of India, with all its faults, has not often been slow to perceive the trend of events in Eastern Arabia, and it was a happy move on the part of its representative at Kuwait, Captain W. H. I. Shakespeare, to visit Riyadh in the winter following the Wahhabis' capture of the Hasa. Ibn Sa'ud took a great liking to this Political Agent of Kuwait: the admira-

THE CONQUEST OF THE HASA

tion was reciprocated. There is little doubt that it was Captain Shakespear's reports to his Government on the nature of the Wahhabi's administration which persuaded the British that a new star was rising on the firmament of Arabia.

Not only because of the machinations of his enemies, but also for its own sake, Ibn Sa'ud would have liked, in this winter of 1913-14, to conclude a treaty of friendship and alliance with the British Empire. His exile in the nineteenth century at Kuwait and his admiration of the diplomacy of Shaikh Mubarak were not forgotten by Ibn Sa'ud when he had the opportunity of dealing with these British. It was an opportunity which, though not consummated before the War, he would renew and renew, until he had at last fashioned a treaty satisfying his full aspirations.

Hitherto but a soldier and an administrator in inner Arabia, he must now, owing to his possession of a sea frontier, become diplomatist as well. How would the mind of a desert Arab work when pitted against cosmopolitan minds? The sequel will show.

Meanwhile, the Turks had to regulate their position with the new conqueror of Al Hasa; or, more accurately, Ibn Sa'ud had to regulate his position with the defeated Turks. A *rapprochement* was effected in the autumn of 1913, and in the early summer of the following year Ibn Sa'ud was nominated by the Constantinople Government as Wali of Najd and Hasa: his title was *Sahib ad-Daula*. That is a point to note: Ibn Sa'ud

I B N S A ' U D

had not definitely declared himself independent of the Ottoman Government. So long as he exerted absolute power in Najd and Hasa, he did not object to having to do so in the name of the Turkish Government.

To this fact there is also another aspect. It was not possible, at this stage, to take Ibn Sa'ud as the supreme representative of Arab Nationalism — a subject which ever since the Young Turks' oppression of the Arabs in 1908 and the consequent desire of Arabs for freedom had been studied with particular care by British strategists. It is true that the Wahhabi emergence of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had given a sort of background and a vague impetus to an Arab Nationalist movement, and that its revival in the twentieth century had done even more. But enough had not been accomplished by the Najdis before the Great War to warrant an exclusive reliance on Wahhabi zeal for ridding the Peninsula of Ottoman influence.

The position of Ibn Sa'ud when the War broke out was that the Turks recognized, and, in so far as they trusted any Arab, trusted him. But he had one eye on his rival in the west, the Sharif Husain of the Hijaz, and another on his rival to the north, Ibn Rashid of Ha'il. Yet towards neither of them would he look with any apprehension, particularly if he could secure first the friendship of the principal Power in the Persian Gulf, namely, the British.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR

The World War — Battle of Jarrab — Treaty with Great Britain — Growing Jealousy of Sharifians — 1914—1917

If the declaration of war by Turkey in October, 1914, brought to the more powerful chiefs in Arabia any immediate prospect of complete independence of the Ottoman Power they failed to promulgate it. At once, however, Great Britain looked over the Peninsula to see where she could obtain allies in the world struggle. Sooner or later she found them everywhere except in two quarters: the Yaman, where the Imam Yahya remained faithful to the ten-year pact which he had made in 1911 with the Turks, and the State of Ha'il, where the Rashids also remained faithful to the Turks, to whom they had always been well disposed.

In November, 1914, Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait co-operated in the capture of Basra, on the condition, which was accepted, that his principality should be recognized as independent of the Turks and should receive British protection. In April, 1915, a treaty was signed between the British and the Idrisi of Asir, who even before the War had shown very marked anti-

Ottoman proclivities. In July, 1915, correspondence (which, however, never culminated in a formal treaty) was begun with the Sharif Husain, with whose cause that of the whole Arab race was, in the vulgar mind, subsequently identified. And on December 25th, 1915, a treaty was signed with Ibn Sa'ud. (It was ratified on July 18th, 1916.)

This is not the place, however, to recount the history of the Arab effort during the Great War.¹ I would only emphasize the fact that the Peninsula was very far from acting as a united force against the Ottoman Power. Rather was each Arab chieftain still pursuing the pre-War manœuvres for adding to his individual position. There has never been an 'Arab patriotism' as against a foreign Power. It is one of the unfortunate results of presenting history in 'colourful' fashion that it should still be imagined that Husain of the Hijaz was, with the willing consent of all the Turk-hating Arabs, waging war in the desert for the sacred cause of Arab independence and of civilization, as represented by the Allied armies.

The facts simply do not accord with such a journalistic fancy.

Actually the first battle in Arabia during the War was fought close to Jarrab and Artawiya, near Zilfi, on January 24th, 1915, between the forces of Ibn Rashid and Ibn Sa'ud. This inconclusive encounter was, in almost every respect, but a continuation of the

¹ See *Revolt in the Desert*. By 'T. E. Lawrence'.

WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR

series of fights between the two States of Hail and Riyadh which had marked the pre-War years. Had Ibn Rashid won, no great joy would have been felt in Turkish ranks; nor would British difficulties in Mesopotamia have been very definitely alleviated had complete success fallen to Ibn Sa'ud.

It is true, however, that Ibn Rashid was striking at Turkish instigation, and that Ibn Sa'ud had already been sounded by the British as a possible ally. For the Chief Political Officer of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Major-General Sir Percy Cox, whose judgment on matters in the Persian Gulf and in Arabia generally was always at once cautious and sound, had sent to Riyadh an officer who was no stranger to Ibn Sa'ud: Captain W. H. I. Shakespear. His mission was to persuade the Wahhabis to bring the utmost pressure to bear on Ibn Rashid, to prevent him from harming the western flank of the British troops in Mesopotamia. War or no war, Ibn Sa'ud would have relished this friendly solicitation.

Fundamentally, therefore, the cause of the quarrel between the two rulers was exactly what it had been before 1914, but it was perhaps sharpened by the manifest interest of non-Arabian parties.

But the battle of Jarrah itself—a typical desert battle, in which the total casualties amounted to perhaps three hundred—was indecisive. Ibn Sa'ud's cavalry were superior to Ibn Rashid's, but his infantry failed him. What happened was that his Ajman allies

I B N S A ' U D

treacherously turned on him and looted his baggage. Even more important, from the British point of view, was the accidental death in the fight of the British agent, Captain Shakespear. He was watching the progress of the fight, dressed in British uniform. A stray bullet wounded him, and in the rough-and-tumble which followed he was despatched by Rashidian swordsmen.

Here is Ibn Sa'ud's own account¹ of the incident. Unlike many Oriental princes, he lacks fulsomeness — his directness springs from a consciousness of his own dignity:

'We fought against Ibn Rashid at Artawiya and a great battle followed: alas! that our cordial friend and well-wisher was hit from a distance and died. We had pressed him to leave us before the fight, but he insisted on being present, saying: "My orders are to be with you. To leave would be contrary to my honour and my orders. I must certainly remain". Pray inform H.M. Government of my sorrow.'

In effect, this stalemate discouraged everyone concerned, particularly Ibn Sa'ud, who had wished to demonstrate his powers to the British and to gain from them support for his position in Arabia, and the British, who had originally hoped that the Wahhabi

¹ Quoted on page 25 of Gertrude Bell's *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, 1920. Cmd. 1061.

WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR

forces might considerably hamper the Turks and any pro-Turkish Arabs there might be in the desert.

As far as Ibn Sa‘ud was concerned, the Great War was virtually at an end. His potentialities for assisting the Allied cause were largely written off, and the idea of active Arab co-operation passed from the British officers on the eastern side of Arabia to those on the western side, particularly to those in Egypt, where in February, 1916, the famous ‘Arab Bureau’, to assist and guide Husain of the Hijaz, was formed.

Ibn Sa‘ud had, it seemed, missed a glorious opportunity for riding to power as master of the Peninsula on the back of an Allied victory.

His real status at this time was defined in the Treaty of December, 1915, which Sir Percy Cox went down to Uqair to negotiate. In the first Article of that agreement the British Government (Sir Percy actually was acting on behalf of the Government of India) recognized that Najd, the Hasa, Qatif and Jubail, with their ports on the Persian Gulf, belonged as of right to Ibn Sa‘ud and his predecessors, and the Wahhabi ruler was declared to be the absolute chief of this territory. The succession to this State was to be by descent from Ibn Sa‘ud, who was to nominate his successor (with the proviso that the British Government should approve of such a successor).

Secondly, the British Government would come to Ibn Sa‘ud’s aid should any foreign Power attack the Wahhabi territories.

I B N S A ' U D

Thirdly, Ibn Sa'ud pledged himself not to enter into relations with any foreign Power.

Fourthly, he undertook not to cede territory nor grant concessions to any foreign Power without the consent of the British Government, and to follow British advice were it not harmful to his own interests.

Fifthly, he undertook to keep open all routes leading from or through his territories to the Holy Places of Arabia, and to protect pilgrims passing along such routes.

Sixthly, he undertook to refrain from all aggression on the territories of Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Shaikhs of Qatar and of the Oman coast, who were already in treaty relations with the British Government.

And lastly, the two parties agreed — seeing that the present treaty was being negotiated in a time of war — to conclude a further detailed treaty.

Now this was not a humiliating document: it was a mirror of facts at the time. And yet, from this date onwards, the Wahhabis stirred scarce a hand against the Turks. Why was this?

There were two main reasons. First, Ibn Sa'ud was some miles away from the Turk, and the greater success of British arms in Mesopotamia, the farther became his distance from his liege-lords. And secondly, and more important, was the fact that the British chose as agent of their designs in Arabia one of Ibn Sa'ud's hated rivals, the Sharif Husain of Mecca. His

WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR

neutrality against Arabs friendly to the Allies but obnoxious to himself was, it is true, secured by the payment of £5,000 a month,¹ but the news that Husain, who already in 1912 had dared to inflict humiliation on him, was receiving no less than £200,000 a month from the British was far from sweet to his ears. It may even have been considered in Riyadh that Wahhabi benevolent neutrality was worth more to the British than the active co-operation of the Sharifians.

Doubtless, also, Ibn Sa'ud was discouraged by the result of the battle of Jarrab and by his subsequent treatment at the hands of the Ajman.

I do not wish here to go into the war politics of the desert: their importance upon the result of the world-struggle in any case has been exaggerated. During the years 1914-1918 many confidences were misplaced, and swans turned out to be geese. It is easy to be wise after the event. But I think it fair to say, in a study which is admittedly laudatory of the Wahhabi King of Arabia, that in my opinion the Arab revolt in the Hijaz was urgently desirable, and that, that being so, discreet trust in and reliance upon the late King Husain were essential.

The condition of the Red Sea route — the main route between Great Britain and the East would, after the failure at the Dardanelles, have been highly problematical if the eastern shore had remained under undisputed Turkish control. Germany would surely

¹ This subsidy lasted until the end of March, 1924.

I B N S A ' U D

have dispatched thither such machinery as to render Allied shipping extremely precarious.

No: it is no disparagement of the Wahhabi cause to confess that, in principle, at all events, the Hijaz revolt was a correct move in Allied strategy. In the actual circumstances, especially the circumstance of the vanity of Husain, who wished to appear as if performing in the name of all the Arabs, and the circumstance of the antipathy felt towards him by Ibn Sa'ud, it is a little difficult to see how any vast powers could simultaneously have been allotted to the Wahhabi cause. The fact that Ibn Sa'ud's friendship was with the British was of considerable, if indirect, help; at no time during those stirring events which were to result, among other things, in the changing of Arabia's face, was there the slightest doubt of the loyalty of the Wahhabi chief.

But, as I say, he could do little. To await tranquilly is an Islamic virtue, and the Wahhabi henceforth had to bear himself patiently, to —

‘arm the obdured breast
With stubborn patience as with triple steel.’

For him, the war-years were a time of depression, but they were not all fretting.

I must revert to Ibn Sa'ud's activities after the abortive battle of Jarrab. It is extraordinary to note, in Arabian history, how often an affray insignificant in

WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR

the number of casualties can upset large schemes. So it was now with the Wahhabi leader. While his own local position was secure enough (he could rely on British support for that), he had scant means of extending it. And as Ibn Rashid retired to Ha'il, so he to Riyadh.

That did not mean, however, that he lacked all opportunity of showing his good will. A notable chance came with a change of succession in the principality of Kuwait. His old friend and first protector, Shaikh Mubarak, died in November, 1915. He was succeeded by his son, Jabir, who had already fought with Ibn Sa'ud against Ibn Rashid of Ha'il. But Jabir himself died in 1916, and his brother, Salim,¹ who succeeded him, was by no means so well-disposed to the British, and consequently to the Wahhabis, as Mubarak and Jabir had been.

Shaikh Salim did his best to weaken the Wahhabi position by encouraging the Ajman of the Hasa to revolt, and in 1916 Ibn Sa'ud was busily occupied in dealing with this never very reliable tribe. It was during a military expedition against these treacherous tribesmen, indeed, that S'ad, the favourite but not always wise brother of Ibn Sa'ud, who had supported him almost from the beginning of his reign, fell. The affection of Ibn Sa'ud for his near relatives has always been deep, and he felt the loss of S'ad keenly.

During this time the Wahhabi's touch with the out-

¹ Died in February, 1921, and succeeded by Shaikh Ahmad, son of Jabir.

side world — apart from that preserved by his able agent in Basra, Abdul Latif Pasha Mandil — was chiefly maintained through Kuwait. Here Lt.-Col. R. E. A. Hamilton (later Lord Belhaven and Stenton) had taken the place of the lamented Captain Shakespeare as Political Agent, and he was not less an admirer of Ibn Sa‘ud than his predecessor had been. There is, indeed, no Englishman (or, for that matter, any other European or American), from before the War down to the present year of 1933, who, on meeting Ibn Sa‘ud, has failed to recognize the unusual force, sincerity, humanity, and dignity of this Arab ruler’s character.

On the initiative of Sir Percy Cox and of Colonel Hamilton, Ibn Sa‘ud, in November, 1916, paid a visit to the base of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force at Basra. There he was treated, both by the British and the surrounding Arabs, with the respect which he deserved. He received salutes, inspected naval sloops and guards of honour. Sir Arnold Wilson, in his *Loyalties, Mesopotamia 1914-1917*, has left on record (p. 160) the impression which the Wahhabi’s bearing then made on all.

During this visit an incident occurred which must have sunk deep into the tenacious memory of the future Puritan King. At Basra Ibn Sa‘ud expressed a wish to be present at Divine Service on Sunday. The Naval Chaplain of the warship on which he travelled was absent, and the duties were consequently under-

WAHHABIS IN THE GREAT WAR

taken by the Admiral himself—Rear-Admiral Sir D. St. A. Wake. Ibn Sa‘ud was impressed alike by the reverence of the congregation and by the fact that the Admiral had conducted the service. He has never been a man to minimize spiritual values and spiritual discipline in a nation. Often in his own country he has led the prayers of the community.

At this meeting with the British Ibn Sa‘ud did not conceal his dislike of the policy which the British Government (albeit a different Department from that which was directing policy in Mesopotamia) was pursuing with his rival, the Sharif Husain. The British in the eastern theatre of the War appeared, indeed, to approve of the Wahhabi's attitude. There was in fact little liaison between the pro-Sharif school in Egypt and the pro-Wahhabi school in Mesopotamia. In order to create some sort of common policy between them Mr. Ronald Storrs,¹ an ardent exponent of the 'T. E. Lawrence' policy, had arrived in June in Mesopotamia from Cairo to discuss matters with Sir Percy Cox, and this distinguished and persuasive Arabist was actually going in July from Kuwait into inner Arabia to explain the situation to Ibn Sa‘ud personally, when he was smitten with sun-stroke.

But the wise decision to send a British officer to Riyadh was not abandoned: Sir Percy Cox, while never overestimating the probable influence of desert warfare on the final result of the War, was

¹ Now Sir Ronald Storrs, Governor of Northern Rhodesia.

resolved that all possible steps should be taken to ensure the success of Arabs' moves against the Ottoman Power. Of the mission which he dispatched to Ibn Sa'ud at the end of 1917 more will be said in the next chapter.

The feelings of jealousy and fundamental superiority with which Ibn Sa'ud watched the Arab capture of Mecca in June, 1916, and the subsequent successes of the 'Arab Revolt' in the Hijaz were fully reciprocated by King Husain, who, indeed, lost no chance of impressing on the British authorities his opinion of the Wahhabi leader. It had been decided, at the same time as a mission was sent to Ibn Sa'ud from Mesopotamia, to send a similar one from Egypt. Husain bluntly refused to allow the mission from Egypt to proceed through the Hijaz: *he* was the King of Arabia and recognized the right of no one else to speak in the Arabs' name.

Husain's contempt for Ibn Sa'ud was, in fact, utter and comprehensive. The British, adopting the fatalistic attitude, perceived that nothing could break down the hostility between the two men, and their main political efforts in Arabia during the rest of the War were to be devoted to keeping the two Arabs apart — at any rate until victory should be assured. After that assurance, few would be surprised — at any rate few of those who studied the Arabian situation from its eastern side — were a deluge to fall.

CHAPTER X

JEALOUSY BETWEEN RIYADH AND MECCA

Sharif versus Wahhabi — British Mission at Riyadh — Battles of Khurma and Yatab — Armistice—1917—1918

IT has already been hinted that Husain's activities during the War were not conceived solely towards the end of an Allied victory. The doctrine of enlightened self-interest does not, as interpreted in Arabia, commonly include the welfare of co-existent rulers. And thus it was that, even before Faisal, son of King Husain, was fighting in the desert against the Turks, Abdullah, his elder brother, had improved the Sharifian hour by excursions eastwards from the Hijaz as far as the Ataiba *dira* (range) and the Qasim and by a general belittlement, among border Arabs, of the Wahhabi leader. Abdullah, in fact, who is now (1933) Amir of Transjordan, has the least pleasant memories of the Wahhabis: not until the present year was he persuaded (not without advice from his brother, the King of Iraq) to come to an amicable agreement with Ibn Sa'ud.

While Faisal went northwards with the victorious Arabs, Abdullah was deputed, with his other brother,

Ali, to invest Medina, the second holiest city in Islam. All the Arab efforts to dislodge the Turks from this place failed: it was surrendered only after the Armistice, when orders came, in January, 1919, from Constantinople, to cede it to the Allies. Its defence by Fakhri Pasha ranks among the most successful performances of the Ottomans during the whole struggle.

But although Abdullah was made the principal agent of Sharifian designs against the Wahhabi, Ibn Sa'ud did not fail to note the part played by Sharif Husain himself. This noble Arab's pretensions grew almost insupportable to the distant Wahhabi, who was held from attacking him by his promises to the British. Yet it would be naive to assume that the provocation was wholly one-sided. All through the War years Ibn Sa'ud was developing his *Ikhwan* and his plan of *hijras* — agricultural settlements to which I have referred in chapter vii. This, of course, he was not only entitled but also wise to do. But it does appear that systematic though peaceful proselytization in favour of the Wahhabis was being indulged in in the no-man's-land between Najd and the Hijaz, or, perhaps one should rather say, in eastern Hijaz itself.

A straw indicating how the wind was blowing was provided by events at Khurma, a border oasis on the Riyadh-Mecca route, about three days' journey from Taif. This village was usually looked upon as owing allegiance to the Amir of Mecca. Its inhabitants, indeed, had been attracted by the gold so freely lavished

JEALOUSY BETWEEN RIYADH & MECCA

by 'T. E. Lawrence' and had sent a contingent to the Sharifian armies against the Turks. But the local representative in Khurma of Husain, Khalid ibn Luwai,¹ had quarrelled with the man who now called himself 'King of All the Arabs', and had withdrawn his men from the Hijazi forces. By 1917 this quarrel had so far developed that most of the inhabitants of Khurma had embraced Wahhabism, and Khalid ibn Luwai had actually ejected those citizens who still professed loyalty to Mecca, and had formally proclaimed the secession of Khurma to Ibn Sa'ud.

World war or no world war, this was more than the imperious Hashimite could endure, and in June, 1918, he organized an expedition against Khurma which, as can now be seen, precipitated the whole downfall of his House and that conflict between Wahhabi and Sharifian which was to end with Ibn Sa'ud's becoming master of the Peninsula from Persian Gulf to Red Sea.

Before dealing with Khurma in 1918, however, I must turn to what was happening at Riyadh, whence Ibn Sa'ud was gratifiedly watching, in the east, the progress of British arms against the Turks in Mesopotamia, and, in the west, with more baleful eye, the increasing claims of Husain to the hegemony of Arabia.

The British mission² to which I alluded in my last

¹ Later, conqueror of Taif and Mecca.

² The Political Agent at Kuwait, Lt.-Col. R. E. A. Hamilton was the first to arrive in, as he was the first to leave, Riyadh. The other two members of the Mission were Mr. St. John Philby and Lt.-Col. Cunliffe-Owen.

I B N S A ' U D

chapter duly arrived in Riyadh at the end of November, 1917. A full account of it has been given by its principal member, Mr. H. St. John B. Philby, in his *The Heart of Arabia* (two volumes) and its continuation, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*. It had a dual purpose, that of keeping Ibn Sa'ud from attacking such pro-British Arabs as Husain, with whom almost every day increased his bad feeling, and that of re-provoking him to attack Ibn Rashid, who had remained unmolested by the State of Riyadh since the battle of Jarrab in 1915. The task of the mission was not easy. In the first place, Baghdad had no such supply of golden sovereigns as bulged the backs of camels trekking up to the Badawin of the Sharif; and secondly, the mission perceived how well justified was Ibn Sa'ud's attitude that, to him at that moment, the Shaikh of Kuwait and the Sharif Husain were a greater menace than was Ibn Rashid of Hail. The Wahhabi, saddened by his bitter experiences against the Ajman after the fight at Jarrab, believed that the Central Powers would win in the end. He foresaw the return of the Turks to Mesopotamia and a threat to his newly-won position in the Hasa. His policy was, therefore, to hold on to Najd and the Hasa and to wait on events.

But patience and persuasion at last achieved the desired purpose: Ibn Sa'ud promised definitely to launch a campaign against Ibn Rashid.

Ignoring the Sharif's threat to Khurma in the middle of 1918 — though only on the explicit guarantee of

J E A L O U S Y B E T W E E N R I Y A D H & M E C C A

the British Government that it would arbitrate, or use its good offices in doing so, on the disputed frontier when the War was over — Ibn Sa‘ud moved up to the Qasim in September, 1918. Well apprised of Wahhabi intentions, Ibn Rashid went back from Madain Salih, in the Hijaz, where, since 1917, he has been assisting the Turks, in order to defend his State.

The clash came at Yatab, in the Shammar country. This time the forces of Ibn Sa‘ud were victorious: they gained not only the day but much booty also. The securing of booty was possibly unfortunate, for its division among warriors who too long had perforce been away from a battle-field gave time for Ibn Rashid to retire to the fortress of Mu‘aimwij Baqa‘a, where the strength of his position was such as to make the Wahhabi refrain from immediate pursuit. Ibn Sa‘ud’s army was, in fact, demobilized for the time being, though it was understood that within a few weeks it would renew the campaign.

But the elimination of the Hail State during the War itself was not to be. Whether or not it could have been achieved with the resources which Ibn Sa‘ud then possessed is possibly open to question, but in any case the problem of Husain of the Hijaz at this juncture quite overshadowed that of Ibn Rashid.

This shadow was cast by Khurma. I have stated that, angered by the defection of Khalid ibn Luwai, Husain had, in June, 1918, sent from Mecca a force to subdue and reincorporate this village in the Hijaz.

I B N S A ' U D

This expedition failed ignominiously. It was defeated by the villagers of Khurma alone, who actually captured all the guns and machine-guns of the invaders, without any help from Riyadh. When messengers brought the news to Riyadh, their way to the Palace was greeted with salvos of rifle-shots — sure evidence of popular joy at the Sharif's humiliation.

Again, in the month following, the Sharifians came at the place, and again they were repulsed.

At this second flouting, by mere upstarts of the desert, Husain's ire was terrible to behold: he resolved to send out yet a third and larger force. Once more the fanatical Khurmans, aided in their desperate position by certain Badawin, beat off the would-be avengers.

But if Husain's anger at the failure of his troops was full, no less full was that of Ibn Sa'ud at the failure of the British authorities in Egypt to hold Husain in check. The inhabitants of Khurma clamoured for the protection which, in deference to British wishes, he had forborn to give them; but, seeing that they would rouse the tribes in their defence, would he not make himself personally responsible for it, he declared that he himself would guarantee to the people of Khurma protection from further aggression by the Sharif — in the meantime awaiting the British Government's decision upon the frontier between Najd and the Hijaz.

His blaze of fury and desire to humble the Sharif

JEALOUSY BETWEEN RIYADH & MECCA

were difficult to control, but finally he was persuaded to a more accommodating frame of mind by the British representative in his capital. To try to find a *modus vivendi*, indeed, he dispatched a courteous letter to Husain.

The letter was returned from Mecca unopened. For the Sharif, there was to be no parleying with the Wahhabis. From this time may be dated Ibn Sa‘ud’s inexorable resolve to depose Husain, and to teach him that, so far from his representing the real Arabia, the true Arabs were those who professed allegiance to Riyadh.

Apropos of this feeling between Wahhabi and Sharif, I may set down a conversation which Colonel R. E. A. Hamilton had with Ibn Sa‘ud at the end of 1917. The British representative had taunted him one day with doing nothing, while the Sharif by his exertions had become a King and was growing more and more powerful every day. Ibn Sa‘ud replied:¹

‘You don’t know the Arabs! We are like our great *wadis* — for instance, the Wadi Rumma, which fills two or three times a century, but when it fills it sweeps all before it, including the habitations built by man on its banks.’

So it was that the Armistice came with the leader of

¹For this recollection I am indebted to Lord Belhaven and Stenton, who explains that the Wahhabi’s inference was that, however the Sharif was able to aggrandize himself by means of foreign support, the Arabs would always ultimately determine their own affairs, and that chiefs who had built their power on outside support, would discover that they had built on foundations of sand which would be swept away by a great national movement.

the Wahhabis consumed with contemptuous hatred of the Sharifian family, whose cause seemed to monopolize the attention of such Western statesmen as were dealing with the future of Arabia, wrathful against Shaikh Salim of Kuwait, who had used the power of blockade harshly against Najd, and unable to boast a final victory over Ibn Rashid of Haïl. His high hopes of advancing and strengthening his State had, it appeared, been cheated. Possessed of no more territory than he has won before the War, and with no immediate prospect of gaining any, he may well have pondered whether he had, in adapting himself to British desires, consulted his own interests closely enough. Husain, on the other hand, he saw blown out like a frog with his own importance and with the deference paid to him and to his sons in the Peace negotiations. It was all, he felt, a hopelessly inaccurate reflection of realities in Arabia, and not only incorrect but also galling.

The Ottomans, it is true, had departed: but were these English, with their extraordinary patronage of the Sharifians, to remain? In those Britons from Mesopotamia whom he had known and with whom he dealt he had absolute confidence, but their opinion, unfortunately, seemed at a discount after the Armistice. Was there no way of enlightening the Peace Conference, no way of pricking this Sharifian bubble?

CHAPTER XI

BRITISH POLICY IN ARABIA

Disillusionment — Battle of Turaba — Ibn Sa‘ud and the British — 1918–1919

THERE is no doubt that the closing weeks of the War were as wormwood to Ibn Sa‘ud. Perhaps his cup was fullest when, as a result of his failure finally to eliminate Ibn Rashid in September, letters arrived in Najd the following month containing decisions that the British mission to Riyadh was to be withdrawn, that, in deference to the desires of King Husain, who secretly was favouring the cause of Ibn Rashid, the Wahhabis should now desist from the campaign against Hail, and that consequently the British Government would take back the thousand rifles, with ammunition, which they had actually delivered to Ibn Sa‘ud’s agent in Kuwait, Abdullah al Nafisi. More than that, Ibn Sa‘ud was given to understand that the High Commissioner of Egypt, Sir Reginald Wingate, was implacably opposed to the British Government’s proposal to send a commission after the Armistice to adjudicate on the Najd-Hijaz frontier — the problem of Khurma.

To Mr. St. John Philby, who has recorded¹ the Wahhabi's feelings in this October of 1918, he unburdened his bitterness. The beam in the eyes of the British Government had, he believed, been placed there by one man alone: the Sharif Husain. This astute Hashimite it was that had monopolized the ear of the British in Egypt, who, since they had something to show for the hopes entertained of their Arabs, were alone listened to, or at any rate regarded, by the British Government.

'Who after this will put their trust in you?' said Ibn Sa'ud to Mr. Philby. 'If your Government declines to modify its policy, I will show them what I can do. *Wallah!* it is the Sharif who is responsible for this blow at me — he has utterly deceived the rulers of Egypt, and I will attack him if, to humour him, your Government persists in treating me so ill.'

This was no rhetorical boast. It was perhaps natural, it was certainly unfortunate, that the amazing exploits in the Hijaz and on the right flank of General Allenby's armies in Palestine and Syria of 'T. E. Lawrence' and other Englishmen and Arabs whose names have since become famous should have bewildered, or bemused Western, and especially British official, opinion. The world after the Armistice was a little unbalanced. Worse than that, it was puzzled and hesitant, and, worst of all, it was ignorant. The British Government, despite the fact that Lord Curzon was its Foreign

¹ In his *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, pp. 332–333.

BRITISH POLICY IN ARABIA

Secretary, was, in its dealings with Arabia, under the spell of the 'Arab Bureau' of Cairo, which, with its dictum that to those Arabs who had fought successfully on the side of the Allies should be given the major spoils of victory, prevailed in the advices of Whitehall.

It was probably inevitable that this should be so: the Ministers who accepted the view that the whole of Arabia should be envisaged through Sharifian spectacles had many other problems, vastly more important, from the point of view of the Allies, than the future of Arabia to resolve. In vain did those officials who saw Arabia from the Mesopotamian side counsel that the opinion and attitude of Ibn Sa'ud of the Wahhabis could not safely be ignored; in vain did the Civil Commissioner for Iraq urge that, in the Peace Treaties, provision should be made for recognition of the independence of Najd 'in terms not less explicit than those employed in relation to King Husain of the Hijaz.'¹

Weeks passed, and still the Wahhabi leader had no precise notion of how the negotiators of peace in Paris intended to deal with him. He feared, and prepared for, his being ignored. For wormwood, though bitter, is stimulating.

In the meantime, King Husain of the Hijaz himself was far from satisfied. He had dreamed, when in 1915 he was conducting correspondence with the

¹ Sir Arnold Wilson's *Mesopotamia, 1917-1920*, p. 106.

British Government, of the war's ending with himself in possession of a vast Arab empire extending from the Anatolian mountains to the Indian Ocean, and from the Perso-Iraqi frontier to the Mediterranean. Instead of this, he saw the French installed in Syria, the Zionists in Palestine, and the British remaining as the conquerors they were of Mesopotamia.

But Husain would not remain idle, in face of what he in his vanity considered to be the treachery of the Allies. Through the agency of his two sons, Abdullah and Faisal, he endeavoured to force the hands of those who had liberated the Arabic-speaking peoples of the countries north of the Peninsula proper, while he himself would clear away the few blemishes which, owing to his preoccupations during the War, had been left unremoved in Arabia itself.

First, there was the ignominy of a triple defeat at Khurma to be wiped off. It will be remembered that Ibn Sa'ud had definitely promised the Khurmans protection against further aggression by the Sharif. The village was Wahhabi, and Wahhabi he intended it to remain. Equally firm was Husain's intention that it should be re-included in the Hijaz. Between these two resolves no accommodation was possible. By about February or March of 1919, it became plain that a clash between Sharifian and Wahhabi was being prepared and could not be avoided.

It was in these circumstances that the British Government held an Inter-Departmental Conference on

BRITISH POLICY IN ARABIA

March 10th.¹ A practically unanimous decision was reached that Husain must be supported, and a practically unanimous opinion was expressed that, if it came to fighting, Husain, with his superior arms and experience, would win. Lord Curzon, presiding over the conference, summed up the sense of the meeting by saying: 'Our policy is a Husain policy.' The oasis of Khurma was thereupon adjudicated to the Sharif. It is to the credit of Mr. St. John Philby, at that time a member of the Indian Civil Service, who had been loaned to the Administration of Mesopotamia, that he alone in this conference had no doubt that Husain would not be on the winning side.

In May it was seen that the promised arbitration on the disputed frontier having been a matter, not for a local commission, but merely for the decree of distant 'experts' sitting in London, Ibn Sa'ud was moving against the Sharif. Another Inter-Departmental Conference was assembled in Whitehall. At this the decision was arrived at to reduce the subsidy paid monthly to Ibn Sa'ud from £5,000 to £2,500.²

Actually this decision was never conveyed to the Wahhabi leader, who in any case was too busily occupied then to be brought to a halt by financial considerations alone. He felt, rightly, that his whole future,

¹ For details, see a lecture on 'The Triumph of the Wahhabis', by H. St. John Philby, in the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*. Vol. XIII. Part 4.

² With characteristic courage and wisdom the Acting Civil Commissioner of Mesopotamia, Sir Arnold Wilson, refused to execute the order to this effect.

the very existence of his realm, in fact, was now at stake; and he took the field himself.

Moving against him was a very strong force, under the command of Husain's son, Abdullah. This shrewd desert warrior had, by the end of April, assembled, in addition to the usual contingents of Badawin who, foreseeing loot, swell any determined force, some four thousand regulars. These last were in charge of Syrians or Iraqis who had been trained in the Turkish armies, and, from their experience in the Great War alone, knew how to handle the guns and machine-guns with which they were liberally supplied.

From Taif these confident Sharifians marched out toward Khurma by way of Turaba, a walled village about forty miles south-west of the disputed oasis.

At Turaba the Amir Abdullah discovered that some of the citizens, like those of Khurma a year or two previously, had been intriguing with the enemy Wahhabis. These he promptly executed: this was to be a definite campaign, and he was taking no chances. But relatives of the men thus dispatched, though doing homage to the son of the Sharif, not only helped the Sharifians to entrench Turaba but also, their fear of Abdullah being surpassed only by their fealty to the Wahhabi cause, contrived to smuggle out to Khurma details of the defence of the Sharifian-infested town.

The invading troops were now utterly content. They had purged the place of traitors and had fortified it according to the latest rules of warfare. Their

BRITISH POLICY IN ARABIA

commander, always a man of good cheer, exuded confidence in his impregnable position. Happy and sure of themselves, these Sharifians retired, on the night of May 24th, for comfortable and reassuring sleep.

But when Khalid ibn Luwai, the fiery spirit who had been placed in charge of Khurma by Husain and had, as has been related, seceded to the Wahhabis, heard of Abdullah's actions, he decided to fight immediately. Without waiting for or even consulting Ibn Sa'ud, who himself with his main force was some miles east of Khurma, at the wells of Sakha, Khalid resolved to ravage these proud invaders from Taif.

Furious and fanatical, Khalid and his tried Khurmans reached Turaba in the dark. The oasis slept peacefully, with the stars as its only sentinels. Suddenly the still May night was broken by the Wahhabi war-cry. Unsuspecting and unguarded the Sharifian soldiers could make no defence. Before any could realize what was happening, the heedless steel of the enraged Puritans was in them. Many were butchered in their sleep, many before they could rise to parry. It was carnage of a primeval kind, pandemonium such as had not been seen in Arabia since the Wahhabi raids of more than a hundred years previously. Nor was it any more refined than those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century excursions which had shocked the Islamic world.

Of all the five thousand Sharifians, not more than

one hundred lived to tell the tale. But among the survivors was the Amir Abdullah, who fled precipitately in his nightshift. From his lips it was that news first came to the dismayed Sharif Husain, and thence to the British representative in Jidda, of the annihilation of the avenging force.

The next day, May 25th, Ibn Sa'ud himself came to the place, now incorporated into the Wahhabi domain. He saw such numbers of dead as perhaps even he had never seen, such evidence of ferocity as he, at heart always a kindly soldier, would never have indulged in. He walked, indeed, among the dead, and from the weather-beaten cheeks of this giant Arab tears were observed silently rolling down.

'This,' he said brokenly, 'is the burden with which Allah had burdened me. Upon me is the responsibility of bringing the *mushraqin*¹ back to the straight path. . . . Would that I were a common soldier fighting for the cause of Allah.'²

So spoke the real Ibn Sa'ud; and all those who saw and heard him, pro-Sharifian and pro-Wahhabi alike, were touched by the simple sincerity of the man. It is incidents such as this that the Arab stores in his memory and recounts to his sons' sons.

But the world, that part of the world, at any rate,

¹ See page 77. Strictly, *mushraqin* are those Muslims guilty of *shirk*, the sin of giving God a partner, of associating with the name of Allah those of saints or interceders.

² Quoted by Ameen Rihani in his *Ibn Saoud of Arabia, His People, and His Land*, p. 19.

BRITISH POLICY IN ARABIA

which was interested in Arabia, was alarmed, not so much by the appalling massacre of Turaba, as by the fact that the Wahhabis — and not even the chief Wahhabi, but one of his subordinate commanders — had routed the flower of the Sharifian army. Where would these fanatical *Ikhwan* stop? Would they overrun the Holy Places of Arabia, there to imperil thousands of Muslims for whose safety Allied Powers were largely responsible? Could even Ibn Sa‘ud stay his wild men? Was there no arresting them?

Such were the impressions which passed across the minds of those to whom the prowess of the Wahhabi was a new conception. The thought of sending aid to Husain against his terrible foe occurred to the British Government, which, fortunately, had the good sense to reject it as impracticable and undesirable.

But the way to Mecca and the Red Sea coast was, indubitably, open to these Najdis. It was generally regarded as certain that the Wahhabis would follow up their astounding victory by advancing into the Hijaz. In Jidda, thousands of Muslim refugees — for the most part British Indian subjects who had journeyed to the Holy Land of Arabia for the Pilgrimage — besought the British and other Consuls for advice on how to procure vessels that were lacking to take them away as fast as their fears dictated.

Actually, however, Ibn Sa‘ud had determined to be content with this demonstration of his superiority over the Sharif Husain. Such a triumph, he felt, must con-

vince the British Government of the error of its interpretation of the Arabian situation. He therefore retired eastwards.

By this act he proved once more his statesmanship. So long as the Holy Cities of Arabia were inviolate, Great Britain, whose goodwill Ibn Sa'ud never refrained from seeking to win, really cared little what was happening in Central Arabia. Already, moreover, she had found Husain of the Hijaz an uncommonly intractable person to deal with, and though she had at that time no formal treaty with him, she might have considered herself in honour bound to assist him if his capital were actually threatened by the Wahhabis.

Unquestionably this victory of Turaba did revise British official ideas on the potentialities of Ibn Sa'ud. The glamour surrounding the Sharifian cause had not, truly, yet disappeared — there is no valid reason why it should ever disappear — but side by side with it there now existed a wholesome respect for the Amir of Najd. Ibn Sa'ud had achieved his immediate purpose of humbling the Amir of Mecca. Now would he settle scores with his less formidable and less patronized neighbours.

CHAPTER XII

MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA
AT LAST

Ibn Sa'ud's Son in London — Wahhabi Extension into Asir — Victory over Ibn Rashid — Incorporation of Hail — 1919—1921.

THE victory of Khurma put visible heart into the Wahhabis, particularly on account of its probable effect on the British attitude towards Arabia. For Ibn Sa'ud, though sore with the English authorities for their encouragement of Husain's pretensions, saw clearly that to have them definitely on his side would be a quite invaluable asset. So solicitous was he to cultivate good relations with the Power which had driven the Ottomans from Arabia that, towards the end of 1919, he sent his second son, Faisal, to London on a congratulatory mission. The royal envoy was only fourteen years of age at the time, but his visit had the effect of drawing, uninformed, as well as informed, British opinion to the fact that there were other than Sharifian interests in the Peninsula to be considered. The Amir Faisal (not to be confused with Husain's son of the same name, now King of Iraq) was accom-

panied by his cousin, Ahmad ibn Thunaian, and was escorted by Mr. Philby, who by that time was recognized at the British 'expert' on Najd. This mission from Riyadh had no definite diplomatic purpose, but its results were generally beneficial.

Meanwhile, events were running awkwardly for King Husain of the Hijaz. His high hopes of hegemony had been dashed on the disclosure of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 for the division of Syria and Mesopotamia into French and British spheres of influence, and by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which guaranteed that the British Government would facilitate in Palestine the establishment of a 'Jewish National Home'. Actually his dream had been shattered by his quarrel during the War with his son, the Amir Faisal, who commanded the Arab forces in the desert, and who, had he not disobeyed his father's instructions, would have achieved little. In any case, he refused to admit what the Allied Powers, faced with the difficulty of reconciling irreconcilable promises, considered to be the realities of the situation, and the Anglo-Hijazi Treaty to which he had looked forward, not so much as a protection of his position in inner Arabia, but as an emblem of his prestige in outer Arabia, was never in fact consummated. And after 'T. E. Lawrence' had been to Jidda in 1921 in an attempt to make the Sharif accept reduced terms and had returned with nothing signed, it was seen that no possible treaty could satisfy the vainglorious old king.

MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA AT LAST

Finding things so unsatisfactory outside Arabia proper he endeavoured to consolidate his position within the Peninsula. He advised the rulers alike of Hail, Kuwait, and Asir to persist in or cultivate hostility towards the Wahhabis, and actually wrote letters of incitement to Ibn Rashid and the chief of the interior of Asir—not the Idrisi, but the Governor belonging to the Aidh family which had rebelled against the Idrisi. These letters were intercepted by Wahhabi agents.

The triumph of Khurma had set all the border tribes buzzing with speculation on where the next blow of Ibn Sa'ud would fall; for although the Wahhabis had refrained from swarming into the Hijaz, it was obvious that the *Ikhwan*, once they had felt the expansionist urge, would demand further outlets for their zeal.

Ibn Sa'ud decided first to deal with Asir. This province between the Hijaz and the Yaman had been a sort of no-man's-land in Arabia, owing allegiance in part to the Yaman, in part to the Hijaz, in part to the Turks, and, in its one independent part, to the Idrisi, with his capital at Sabia. Asir had been the first Arab State actively to enter the War on the Allied side, and after the War, between the years 1919 and 1921, it was endeavouring to play the old game of expanding at the expense of its neighbours.

In the summer of 1920 Ibn Sa'ud prepared a large expedition, of 5,000 men, whom he placed under the

command of the same young Faisal who had been in England only the year previously.

Abha, the capital of the Asir highlands, lay some 700 miles away from Riyadh — thirty days' march. The trek was a severe experience for so young a boy. But he performed his mission with notable success. The hereditary rulers of the Abha district (who in the year before the War had been chastized by an expedition of the Sharif Husain, then acting under Turkish instructions to restore order in this always restless province) had appealed to Riyadh in their difficulties.¹ Memories of Wahhabi rule of a century previously in these Asir highlands were not wanting — though they were unnecessary — to induce Ibn Sa'ud to answer the call for help.

Here was just the chance for expansion which, seeing that it could cause no international complications, he might have chosen. True, the low plains of Asir — the *Tihama* — defeated the sturdy *Ikhwan*, who could not endure the pestilential climate, and the Najdi forces had to retire from the port of Qunfidha. But they annexed the Abha plateau, which now became definitely Wahhabi territory. In 1921 the expedition returned joyously to Riyadh, where the Amir Faisal was hailed as the 'hero of Abha'.

Once more the fine brow of Husain in Mecca be-

¹ Thus Philby in his *Arabia*, p. 276. Other authorities, e.g. Ameen Rihani and the *Survey* for 1925 published by the Royal Institute for International Affairs state that the Abha garrison had rebelled against Wahhabi authority and that the Amir Faisal's expedition was, therefore, a punitive one.

MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA AT LAST

came clouded. His hopes for the north of Arabia were being discomfited by the wiles of Allied statesmen, while here, on his very south-western borders, his most hated rival, the Wahhabi, was encroaching. His communications with the Yaman were, naturally, adversely affected by Ibn Sa'ud's annexation of part of Asir, as he found to the cost of his prestige when a caravan coming up from the Yaman to make the Pilgrimage to Mecca was captured by the Wahhabis.

This was intolerable to the proud Hashimite: but what could he do? Though victor in the World War, he now seemed isolated. His sons, though they never lost their affection for their noble father, showed what they thought of his diplomacy by playing their own hand with the Allied Powers: in 1920 Faisal, who after the War had been placed on the throne of Syria by the British, was ejected by the French, and in the same year Abdullah, though elected King of Iraq, had not seen fit actually to go to Baghdad to receive the homage of a people to whom he was unknown except by name.

Husain must, then, strike at the rising Wahhabi power through other Arabian chieftains, among whom he selected, first, Ibn Rashid of Ha'il. Already he had taken the side of the Rashids — even though they had been consistently pro-Turkish during the War — against the Wahhabis, and he perceived clearly that through these masters of Ha'il alone, whom not even the Great War and the complete rout of the Ottomans could

dislodge from their buffer position between Najd and Iraq, could effective pressure be brought to bear on Ibn Sa'ud. To Ibn Rashid, therefore, Husain, though money was as glue to him, actually passed gold and arms, in the hope that the Shammar and neighbouring tribes might be able to inflict on the Wahhabis that punishment which his own son Abdullah had failed so signally to procure at Khurma. As a matter of fact, Ibn Rashid, in view of his isolated position after the War, was only too glad to be assured of Sharifian support against an enemy who might be reckoned to be hereditary.

But Ibn Sa'ud was very far from forgetting his old feud with Ibn Rashid. He could afford to bide his time, though the Sharifian surreptitious support for Hail was by no means concealed from him. Actually, however, his clash with Ibn Rashid was precipitated by an unexpected event.

This was the assassination, towards the end of 1920, of Sa'ud ibn Rashid, a chieftain of considerable skill and courage. He had been not only a brave man, but also a diplomatist, and had actually regained for the State of Hail the district of Jauf which Nuri Sha'lan of the Ruwala had wrested from Hail during the War.

Sa'ud was succeeded by his nephew, Abdullah ibn Mit'ab, who was to enjoy his throne for but a year. This man was weak and could do little to appease the increasing dissatisfaction, especially of the Hail mer-

MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA AT LAST
chants, of his people. His hold on the State grew weaker as each month passed.

At last, Ibn Sa'ud felt that the moment was ripe for a move northwards into the Qasim. His *Ikhwan* were only too ready for an expedition. Already since the War they had had their appetites whetted (and, incidentally, their fingers burned) by attacks on Iraq and Kuwait: now they foresaw easy loot and glory.

By the spring of 1921 Ibn Sa'ud had evolved a triple scheme of assault of the Hail State. His main body, under his brother Muhammad, moved up northwards from Riyadh, while from the east the *Ikhwan* levies under the redoubtable Faisal al Duwish, leader of the fierce Mutair tribe, and Nuri Sha'lan¹ from the north and north-west would create diversions.

But before he actually accomplished the demolition of the historic House of Rashid, Ibn Sa'ud had been elected Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies. An assembly of leading Najdis — *ulama* and chiefs — invited him at Riyadh to assume this title, and he consented. He was, of course, obviously worthy of it, and official British recognition of it, which was requested by him, was accorded the following August.

It appears that, though satisfied of British goodwill at this time, he was a little perturbed by the fact that Faisal, son of the Sharif of Mecca, had arrived in July in Iraq, where it was patent that, by means of

¹ The astute Arab who appears often in 'T. E. Lawrence's' *Revolt in the Desert*.

an Oriental usage of Western democratic methods, he would be acclaimed King. However that may be, he resolved to push forward against Hail with all possible speed.

Making his headquarters in the Qasim he sent out two detachments, under his brother Muhammad and his son Sa'ud¹ respectively to besiege Haïl. Abdullah ibn Mit'ab, the ruling Amir, had no sort of heart to withstand so elaborate and resolute a campaign: he knew not which way to turn — against Nuri Sha'lan in the north, against Faisal al Duwish in the east, or against the main Wahhabi force in the south. More of a philosopher than a soldier, he cast himself on the mercy of Ibn Sa'ud, who dispatched him, a prisoner, to Riyadh. There, in the capital of Najd, he may be seen to-day enjoying the comfortable liberty of contemplating the mutability of human affairs.

Hail itself, however, was not to shed its glories without a struggle. There is pathos in the story of its last hours. A man of much more determined outlook than Abdullah had been, Muhammad ibn Talal, took the title of Amir after it had been so feebly surrendered, and at once injected a new spirit of resistance into the rather disconsolate Rashidians. A fine man, this Muhammad, who believed in his ability to re-galvanize the Shammar and to uphold the best traditions

¹ Now Heir-Apparent and Viceroy of Najd. Ibn Sa'ud's eldest son, Turki, a much loved boy, had died from the influenza epidemic in 1919. Even now Badawin are to be heard referring to their great King as the father of his eldest son — 'Abu Turki'.

MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA AT LAST
of the earlier Hail State. He actually issued out of Hail
to attack the Wahhabis.

But the odds against Muhammad were too great. In the north, Nuri Sha'lan had already taken Jauf, and in the south-west, Faisal al Duwish had at least two thousand of his Mutairis to contain the Shammar. This was a force sufficient to repel though not to attack the adherents of Muhammad, and for a time each side watched the other. But Muhammad's patience gave way first, and at last he gave the order to assail the *Ikhwan*. The more zealous defenders prevailed and the Rashidians scattered to various forts in the neighbourhood of Jathamiya and Taisiya, though their position was not broken. Ibn Sa'ud, however, on hearing of the stout defence of Faisal al Duwish, hurried forward with his artillery, which was so effective than Muhammad fled forthwith to Hail.

Yet the capital contained no real means of resistance. The forts of this historic place needed but a few shells to induce their surrender. Muhammad endured as long as he possibly could, but finally, after about eight weeks' siege, he capitulated.

Muhammad also, like his predecessor, Abdullah ibn Mit'ab, now lives a prisoner at liberty in Riyadh. There is in Mr. Rihani's *Ibn Saoud, His People, and His Land* an admirable chapter on the Rashid family existing in comfortable loyalty to the Sa'udi regime in Riyadh in 1922.

So ended the Amirate of Hail: an imposing Arabian

I B N S A ' U D

State which had its roots, however, only in the personalities of a few strong men, and notably the personality of the childless Muhammad the Great (1870-1897). The glory of the mighty Shammar tribe then crumbled, and henceforth would be split into two mutually hostile sections, the one remaining in Wahhabи territory, the other finding a refugees' home in Iraq.

Ibn Sa'ud's treatment of the captured Ha'il was instructive indeed, a pattern for the Arabian world. Though possessed of superior numbers, he had actually been hard put to it to maintain his armies in the field. For the Peninsula during the previous year or two had been experiencing one of those droughts which, were they more closely studied and recorded, would give the clue to many a raid and many a desert battle by the Badawin and to the downfall of many a promising Arabian State.¹ In 1920 and 1921 hundreds of Najdi camels and horses died: beasts perished all over inland Arabia, in fact. It was possible at one time that the Wahhabis' assault on Hail would have to be postponed for lack of transport.

But having proceeded so far, Ibn Sa'ud held on; nor would he desist until the throne of Ha'il had been rid of its Rashids. A proposal by Muhammad that he should remain Amir of Hail, under the suzerainty of Riyadh, was rejected curtly by the Wahhabi: surren-

¹ The Marxist with his economic interpretation of historical events would find in Arabia a quite promising field of research.

MASTER OF CENTRAL ARABIA AT LAST
der and abdication were to be absolute. In his own pressed position he would not spare the pride of the Haïl people in their extremity.

Once his own terms had been accepted, however, he was the great open-hearted conqueror. His generosity was magnificent. 'He won more prestige', says an American writer¹ who knows the Arabs well, 'by his treatment of the captured city than by his military power in taking it.' Looting, for which the *Ikhwan* had been eagerly thirsting, was not allowed even to begin. Instead, the rice of the Wahhabis was brought freely to the ill-fed townsmen. Those non-Wahhabi Muslims — and particularly the Shiahs, who were not unmindful of how the forbears of Ibn Sa'ud had treated their own forbears a hundred and twenty years previously in the Holy Cities of Iraq — who feared the worst were amazed at the clemency of the victor.

Cringing and terror-stricken the Shiahs were bidden come to the mighty Puritan of Najd. They expected extermination, or at best, incarceration. Instead, they received his personal guarantee of security, and were provided with documents in this sense bearing his seal.

It was an historic act, this treatment of Haïl, and for ever qualified the imputation that Wahhabi intolerance of the *mushraqin* manifested itself in killing alone. It has often so manifested itself, but never when Ibn Sa'ud has been present in person.

To seal the bond between Haïl and Riyadh, Ibn

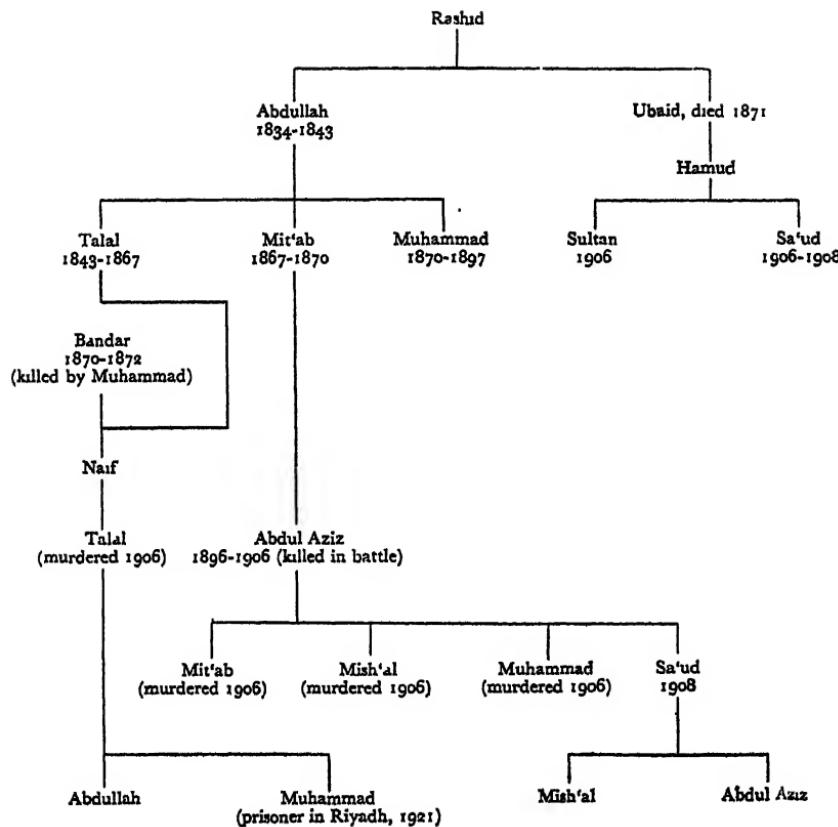
¹ Paul Harrison in *The Arab at Home*, p. 132.

Sa'ud and his son, Sa'ud, each took wives from the deposed Rashid family. The hearts of the townsmen, at any rate, of the Hail State were won: this touch of humanity, this feeling of Arab kinship was too strong to be gainsaid. No wonder that Ameen Rihani heard the head of the Rashid family say to the Sultan of Najd in Riyadh: 'Allah lengthen thy days and strengthen the pillars of thy reign!'

But the capture of Hail, though bringing almost the whole of Central Arabia under one head, brought in its train fresh problems. Ibn Sa'ud's vindication of his House's honour was now complete: the wreckers of his forbears' State of Riyadh were now themselves in the dust. Yet though he added all the Hail State to his domain, he did not add all its inhabitants. For part of the Shammar tribe, which had been the mainstay of the State, chose to cross into Iraq, rather than submit to the Wahhabis, with whom they had had so many fierce encounters. Nor could they be induced to return.

The real ruler of Central Arabia had come into his own, but, in doing so, had upset the balance of power in Arabia. The Wahhabi border now marched with that of Iraq. It was a border scarcely definable — seeing that it was through sheer desert — except in general terms. And the problems created by it were to trouble the two States for nearly ten years, to threaten the very position of Ibn Sa'ud himself, and to uncover the real weakness of his regime.

THE RASHID DYNASTY



CHAPTER XIII

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

Relations with Iraq — Kuwait and Najd — Tribal Difficulties — Treaty of Muhammara — Protocol of Uqair — 1919—1922

IBN SA‘UD must now have bethought him of the art of diplomacy which he had seen practised when he was an exile with Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait at the end of the nineteenth century. For to him would now fall the lot of negotiation, as an equal, with foreign Powers. Previous to his capture of Hail his main frontiers had been with Kuwait, the Jabal Shammar (or Hail) and the Hijaz: he did not touch either Iraq or that part of Syria from which the Amirate of Transjordan was founded in 1921.

Even before he had humbled Ibn Rashid, however, he had had frontier difficulties with Kuwait, and, through Kuwait, with Iraq.¹ His *Ikhwan* had raided both States.

To understand this, the reader must recall the fact that, while Ibn Sa‘ud was ejecting the Turks from the

¹ For details of Iraqi-Najdi relations, see *Report on Iraq Administration*, October, 1920—March, 1922. H.M. Stationery Office.

I B N S A ' U D

Hasa province in 1913, the Turks and the British were drawing up a convention upon Kuwait. In this Anglo-Turkish convention the autonomous Sanjaq of Kuwait had been defined on the map by a circle with a radius of seventy miles from Kuwait on all sides. This area was to be under the direct control of the Shaikh of Kuwait. But the Shaikh was awarded a further 'sphere of influence', and this wider area extended from Umm Qasr to Al Ratk, thence down the Batin to Hafar and eastward to the Persian Gulf at Jabal Manifa — some two hundred miles south of Kuwait town.

Now in the treaty which Ibn Sa'ud had signed with the British in 1915,¹ he had undertaken, among other things, to refrain from interference with Arab principalities friendly to the British, such as Kuwait, Bahrain, and so on. But the limits of these chieftains' territories had been left for future determination. It could not be claimed, therefore, that there was a direct and mutually recognized boundary between the principality of Kuwait and the State of Riyadh. So long as Kuwait and Riyadh were friendly, this did not greatly matter, and Mubarak of Kuwait was on the whole a true supporter of Ibn Sa'ud, as was also his son, Jabir.

But when the tricky though able Salim as Sabah became Shaikh of Kuwait, and began, not only to amass profits from contraband — there is definite evidence that he allowed succour, both food and arms, through his port for the German and Turkish troops

¹ See p. 96.

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

in Syria and Palestine and for the pro-Turkish Arabs in the interior — but also to squeeze Najd commercially, Ibn Sa‘ud resolved to strike a blow to clear up the vague boundary question. He would not tolerate Salim’s abuse of his tribal ‘sphere of influence’. Salim really disliked the Wahhabis, and when in 1919, a dispute over the frontier broke out he was extremely discourteous to Ibn Sa‘ud.

In September, 1919, the Wahhabi sent his fiercest leader of the *Ikhwan*, Faisal al Duwish, on a raid against Kuwait. The Kuwaitis, however, were ready for him, and met and defeated him at Jahra, about thirty miles west of their capital. This battle had the effect of making Kuwait a walled city. For though the townsmen had repelled the *Ikhwan*, they so feared their return that they all volunteered to construct a defensive wall. This ‘Great Wall of Kuwait’ still exists, ten feet high and three or four wide, with turrets and a running-path for firing. It runs in a semi-circle round the town ending on the Gulf north and south. But Kuwait depends for its defence to-day largely on the Royal Air Force, although, as will be seen later in this book, the territorial integrity of the shaikhdom has been consistently preserved by the British.

Kuwait was so impressed with the Wahhabi menace that Shaikh Salim thought fit to try to come to terms with Ibn Sa‘ud. He therefore dispatched his nephew, Ahmad al Jabir, to Riyadh to negotiate a comprehensive agreement. While Ahmad was at Riyadh, Shaikh

Salim died — on February 27th, 1921. Shaikh Ahmad had gained the friendship of Ibn Sa'ud, and when he returned to Kuwait on March 24th, he was nominated by the notables to be Salim's successor. Since that date Kuwaiti-Najd relations have not been free from anxiety, though they appear in recent years to have attained some degree of durability.

This attack on Jahra, though not the first post-War desert encounter, was the signal for a vast series of raids which caused considerable heartburnings to the respective authorities in Riyadh, Baghdad, Kuwait and Amman. To attempt to apportion precise blame for these expeditions, now large, now small, which in successive years violated frontiers that were rather mathematical than geographical would be futile. Sometimes the Wahhabis were to blame, sometimes their opponents. The origin of any particular raid is always apt to be obscure: it goes, or is taken, so far back. But ever the *Ikhwan* were crueler, more primitive; their treatment of women and children, their killing of defenceless and unprovocative shepherd tribes have left memories in non-Wahhabi Arab lands which the passage of scores of years will not readily remove.

It became obvious in fact, during the year or two after the War, that inter-tribal raiding *was* the 'national pastime' of the Badawin. Now though this might have been permitted to continue had Arabia remained a political entity, with no internal boundaries,

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

and under one Power — the Ottoman Government — the post-War partitioning of Arabia into several independent or potentially independent States manifestly could not endure were no frontiers to be observed. In any case, when the British accepted mandates for Arabic-speaking countries in 1920, they were resolved to draw up at least a working system of frontiers.

Even before the Jabal Shammar was incorporated in the Wahhabi domain in 1921, the raiders had determined to resume their sport. Towards the end of 1919, for example, a section of the Shammar, who roved freely between their own State of Hail and Iraq, attacked the Wahhabis. But when the *Ikhwan* counter-raided them in December, it happened that a tribe owing allegiance to the Iraq Administration, the Dhafir, were camping with the Shammar, whose severe losses they perforce shared.

Such an incident as this brought Iraq into direct relations with Najd, and Ibn Sa'ud, anxious, as always, to demonstrate his goodwill towards the British, sent a Najd deputation, in February, 1920, to Baghdad. This Wahhabi mission contained notably, Ahmad ibn Thunaian, who had acted as political adviser to the Amir Faisal when he had visited England the previous year, and Dr. Abdullah al Damluji, a native of Mosul, in Iraq, who spent some years in the service of Ibn Sa'ud before returning, in 1928, to Iraq.

The discussions which these two men had with the British and Iraqi authorities in Baghdad helped, but

did not bring about a solution, and in September, 1920, Sir Percy Cox, the first High Commissioner of Iraq, met Ibn Sa'ud at Uqair, on the Persian Gulf. The meeting was a cordial one, but unproductive of any immediate agreement for the controlling of border tribes. Sir Percy outlined the British proposals for Iraq and Ibn Sa'ud expressed approval of them.

But if the attacks of Wahhabi tribes on Iraqi tribes and *vice versa* had instigated contact between Baghdad and Riyadh — it would be more correct to say between the High Commissioner and the Wahhabi leader, for the personal element in Arabian negotiations counts, and will always count, for much — the campaign in 1921 by Ibn Sa'ud against Ha'il at once produced results in Iraq. These were almost wholly undesirable.

Before Ha'il had actually fallen to the Wahhabis, such a state of lawlessness had been bred in the southern desert of Iraq — the Shamiya district — that many of the local tribes, and notably the Dhafir, had joined gaily in the general unrest. Raids were made on and by Iraqis, *Ikhwan*, and Kuwait tribes more or less indiscriminately: and the *Ikhwan*, with their traditions of mercilessness, seldom came off second-best.

Yet more important than these local forays was the migration of the Shammar which was induced by the Wahhabi pressure from the south. These Shammar tribes went up into Iraq through the grounds of the Amarat Anaiza, a mighty tribe whose leader was Fahad Beg ibn Hadhdhal. Some of them remained

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

with these Amarat, and some went on to cross the Euphrates at Ramadi to join the northern Shammar, or Shammar Jarba, in the Jazira, to the north-west of Iraq. But all these Shammar, whether staying in the Amarat pasturages or going on across the Euphrates, became theoretically liable to pay tribute to the Baghdad Government, as, indeed, those going north realized, by paying *koda*, or the tax on domestic animals.

Here, then, was a capital problem. These refugee Shammar — were they to be treated according to the laws of desert hospitality, or were they to be extradited to the Wahhabi conqueror of Hail who claimed them as his lawful subjects? Now Fahad Beg, of the Amarat, was on friendly terms with Ibn Sa'ud, from whom, indeed, he had received an assurance that his tribe and the tribes camping with the Amarat should be free from *Ikhwan* attacks. The fact, however, that he was now harbouring tribesmen whose allegiance was, in the Wahhabi view, legally due to Riyadh, rather altered matters. Ibn Sa'ud wrote in April a crisp letter to Fahad Beg reminding the Iraqi chieftain that he, Ibn Sa'ud, was also of the great Anaiza tribe, and that he could not consent to the Shammar of Najd being ruled by anyone except himself.

To this letter was added an acid touch by the fact that the refugee Shammar were using the secured Amarat Anaiza's camping-ground as a jumping-off place for their raids on the *Ikhwan*.

I B N S A ' U D

It was an intolerable position from every point of view, as the British High Commissioner recognized. Ibn Sa'ud was so far from showing hostility to the British as to have dissuaded, in the years 1919, 1920, and 1921, his own Najdi subjects from making the Pilgrimage to Mecca, lest friction with the Hashimite ruler of the Hijaz might be generated thereby. That was a proof indeed of friendship with Great Britain. Another, and one scarcely less difficult to make, was supplied in his written declaration that he accepted the proposals of the British Government towards Iraq, even that Faisal, son of the Sharif, should be King of Iraq.

Something must be done, therefore, to prevent so loyal a friend to Great Britain as was Ibn Sa'ud from having so just a grievance in a country (Iraq) for which the British were responsible. Sir Percy Cox began by ordering all the refugee Shammar out of the Amarat *dira* and making them cross to the left bank of the Euphrates, where their movements could be controlled — at any rate more effectually than in the Shamiya desert. Next, having instructed the Political Agent at Kuwait to congratulate the Sultan of Najd on his victory over, and generous treatment of, the Jabal Shammar and to express appreciation of his general conduct, the High Commissioner proposed an early meeting between the Sultan and the new King of Iraq at which the whole problem of Iraqi-Najdi frontiers and their attitude towards border tribes might be threshed out.

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

Ibn Sa‘ud liked Sir Percy Cox: he never concealed his admiration of the Englishman’s flair for diplomacy. Nor has the passage of years diminished that friendship. But he bethought himself of Mubarak’s cautious diplomacy with foreign Powers. A systematized State, with precise borders, regulations, and the rest of it, was alien to his conceptions. Would it not be better, he suggested to Sir Percy Cox, before drawing up a treaty, to discuss first the principles on which such an agreement might be based? The High Commissioner, now in regular consultation with King Faisal, accepted the Wahhabi’s proposal. He suggested, as a basis of negotiation, that the tribes of the Muntafiq, Amarat Anaiza, and Dhafir should be regarded as coming within Iraq’s jurisdiction, and that the line of the Iraq-Najd frontier should be determined in accordance with predominant and prescriptive rights to watering-places. This was provisionally agreed to.

These details concerning frontiers may seem dull to the reader, but I am bound to deal with them, for the problems which arose out of them largely shaped Ibn Sa‘ud’s attitude towards his Sharifian neighbours from some years after 1921.

Now it cannot be claimed that either the Iraq Government or the Najd Government was wholly right in its tribal claims. The situation of the Anaiza, in particular, was complicated by the fact that, whereas the Amarat section under Fahad Beg ibn Hadhdhal was resolute in its wish to retain its direct connection

I B N S A ' U D

with the British, that is, with the Mandatory Power for Iraq, its more westerly section, in the Syrian desert, the Ruwala section, wished to become part of the Wahhabi State. Iraq might be an 'artificial' State, Ibn Sa'ud as of Anaiza stock himself, might be the 'natural' head of the whole Anaiza tribes, but if the Amarat Anaiza desired not to submit to Riyadh, what then?

That was one complication: there swiftly followed another. The Iraq Government for some time had had trouble with the Shaikh of the Dhafir tribe, Humud ibn Suwait. Having exercised no control over his tribe's raiding over the border into Najd, he, very rightly, found that his subsidy from Baghdad was stopped. Now the Dhafir largely controlled the approach to Iraq from Najd. To induce order into their region, King Faisal appointed, as head of the Camel Corps guarding this southern frontier, one Yusuf Beg al Sa'dun, a long-standing enemy of Ibn Suwait. This unfortunate appointment resulted in a prompt visit by the Dhafir leader to Ibn Sa'ud in Riyadh. His visit — though a belated attempt was made from Baghdad to stop it — could not have been unpleasing to the Wahhabi leader, who sent back Ibn Suwait to his *dira* loaded with gifts and accompanied by a representative of the *Ikhwan*, Ibn Ma'amaar, who journeyed for the express purpose of collecting tribute from the Dhafir and from the neighbouring Iraqi shepherds.

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

From the point of view of Iraq, this defection was serious; for just as the heart of the Hijaz lay open to the Wahhabis after the victory of Khurma in 1919, so the heart of Iraq now lay open to the Wahhabis, should they choose to enter. Could the *Ikhwan* refuse the opportunity thus offered? The Iraqi tribes could scarcely believe in such a refusal, and when, in February, 1922, large forces of *Ikhwan* were reported to be massing at Hafar, they prudently withdrew from their deserts towards the Basra-Nasiriya railway.

The expected attack was delivered. It came on March 11th, when Faisal al Duwish, who was to become the 'bogy-man' of this southern desert, looted a place called Abu Ghar, a headquarters of the Iraqi Camel Corps, and raided right on as far as Shaqra, where he killed many Muntaqi tribesmen.

Did this mean war? The *Ikhwan* were getting close to the 'sown', the settled parts of Iraq: were they not held back now, they would without much doubt soon be swarming upwards to the richer cities of Iraq. Would history repeat itself? Fortunately, both Sir Percy Cox and Sultan ibn Sa'ud kept their heads. The Iraqi solution was probably then, as it has certainly been in more recent times, to let the frontier tribes fight it out among themselves. So primitive a solution, however, was palatable neither to the British High Commissioner nor to the Wahhabi leader. Sir Percy wanted war with Najd as the last thing in the world. He contented himself with aerial observation

of the *Ikhwan*, but when, on March 14th, the Royal Air Force were fired on by the fanatical Najdi tribesmen, he brought the matter sharply to the notice of the Sultan of Najd. Ibn Sa'ud thereupon proclaimed, for all who wished to believe it, that he deeply regretted the incidents, that the raiders had acted without his authority, and that he would punish the guilty.¹ Faisal al Duwish, the principal offender, was withdrawn into the interior of Najd.

Ibn Sa'ud's repudiation of the *Ikhwan*'s violence at least left him open to sign the treaty which Sir Percy Cox so ardently desired. While the ground was being cleared by the submission² of Shaikh ibn Suwait of the Dhafir to the Iraq Government, the High Commissioner sent to Ibn Sa'ud his suggestions for a frontier, demanding of the Sultan to withdraw such of his followers as were north of this line.

Ibn Sa'ud complied, and allowed his representatives to discuss in detail a treaty with representatives of Iraq. On May 5th what is known as the Treaty of Muhammara was signed, on behalf of the Iraq Government, by Subhi Beg Nashat, Minister for

¹ Gertrude Bell in her *Letters* (p. 513) thus records the affair: 'Matters came to a head on the 11th (March) when Ibn Sa'ud's people attacked in immense force a camel corps recently organized by the King to protect our frontiers and routed them. To-day the *Ikhwan* fired on an aeroplane reconnaissance and orders were issued that their camp was to be bombed. Ibn Sa'ud may of course repudiate the action of his followers; that's the best that can happen, for otherwise we're practically at war with him.'

² The mode of submission was not unique. Ibn Suwait, having repelled the Iraqi troops dispatched to effect his surrender at Nasiriya, quickly capitulated (in May) to aerial bombardment. This sequence of Iraqi military defeat and British aerial compulsion became melancholy with repetition.

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

Public Works, and, on behalf on Najd, by Ahmad ibn Thunaian, the delicate young Najdi who had accompanied the Sultan's son, Faisal, to Europe in 1919.

This Treaty of Muhammara was the first real post-War effort to draw a frontier through any considerable length of desert. It was an interesting and honest endeavour to introduce into territory intimately known only to nomads ideas accepted only by settled folk. How far it was from being effective in its aim will be seen in the sequel.

Its negotiators, confronted with the problem of seasonally migrating pastoral tribes, determined, as a beginning, to which State, Iraq or Najd, the various tribes belonged. That, of course, was essential: a tribe must know to whom it has to pay tribute. (There could, in the nature of things, be little feeling of 'patriotism', either Najdi or Iraqi, in the matter.) As a logical consequence, it was agreed that the wells and districts (*diras* or 'ranges') habitually used by the different tribes should be recognized as falling within the territory either of Iraq or Najd, as had been decided in the first place.

This agreement enabled the Wahhabis to consent to the inclusion within Iraq of the Muntafiq, Dhafir and Amarat Anaiza, as suggested by the High Commissioner; but they would not accept his provisional frontier (even though Ibn Sa'ud had agreed to withdraw such of his men as were on the 'wrong' side of it) as the definitive boundary between the two States.

IBN SA‘UD

The treaty, though it was shortly afterwards repudiated by Ibn Sa‘ud, on the ground that Najd had made sacrifices to Iraq without any *quid pro quo*, and that no provision had been made for Najdi tribes to enjoy the rights of grazing — though they had so enjoyed them for centuries — is worth summarizing, for it will surely have an influence on all future delimitations of frontiers in desert Arabia.

Article 1 recorded that the Muntafiq, Dhafir, and Amarat Anaiza belonged to Iraq, and that the Shammar (that is, not the Shammar of north-western Iraq in the Jazira, but the southern Shammar who formerly belonged to the Rashidian State of Hail) belonged to Najd; that a joint Iraqi-Najdi commission, presided over by a British official, should decide upon the wells and ranges used by the several tribes and should fix a frontier line on that basis.

In Article 2 the Governments of Iraq and Najd agreed to ensure the safety of the pilgrim routes and to protect pilgrims within their respective territories.

Article 3 placed commercial intercourse between Iraq and Najd on the basis of most-favoured-nation treatment.

Article 4 guaranteed mutual freedom of travel for traders or pilgrims duly provided with passports.

By Article 5 it was stipulated that any tribe of one country which settled in the other country was to pay grazing fees.

And the final Article provided that, in the event of

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

a breach in the relations of either of the contracting parties with the British Government, this Treaty was to become null and void.

It will be seen, therefore, that, details apart, it was the British who had scored a diplomatic triumph: they had ensured that the frontier would be definitely delimited. The committee of delimitation did its work conscientiously (though not on the ground), and theirs was the frontier which, when Sir Percy Cox went down to Uqair,¹ in the Hasa, to meet Ibn Sa'ud the following December, it was agreed should serve.

This boundary began from the western edge of the Batin, at a point some 125 miles south-south-west of Basra, and ran north-west or west to the Jabal Anaza, the central point of the Shamiya desert: this was defined as the neighbourhood of the intersection of latitude 32 deg. N. with longitude 39 deg. E.

To meet the objections of the Wahhabi leader, three points were added: a rhomboid of territory at the south-eastern end of the border, which was regarded in Iraq as within the *dira* of the Dhafir, was declared to be neutral and common ground; Najdi tribes living near the border were given permission to water at the neighbouring Iraqi wells, provided that these were nearer to them than those within the Najd boundaries; and the two Governments mutually agreed not to fortify watering-places adjoining the border and

¹ For a pen picture of this Uqair Conference, see chapter xi of Ameen Rihani's *Ibn Saoud, His People, and His Land*.

I B N S A ' U D

not to concentrate troops in their vicinity or neighbourhood.

Such was the famous 'Protocol of Uqair', which has to be taken in conjunction with the Treaty of Muhammara, containing the Iraqi-Najdi frontier-line. Its signing by Ibn Sa'ud meant that Wahhabi expansion northwards, at any rate, was precluded.

But it is one thing for a Sultan to sign a document, and another for primitive Badawin to understand or observe its contents; as will be seen.

At the same time as this Iraq-Najd agreement there was signed at Uqair a convention between Kuwait and Najd. The frontier between these two States was similarly delimited. Nor was this delimitation so academic as it might have seemed; for Kuwait might, were the ire of Najdi Badawin roused, or the Wahhabi leader's authority to fail, be a quite good enough substitute for Iraq as a place to attack and loot.

This second border started at the eastern edge of the Batin, at a point opposite the starting-point of the Najd-Iraq border, and ran in a direction just south of east until it came back to the 29th parallel of latitude at a point some forty miles west of the Persian Gulf coast and forty miles south-west of Kuwait town. Thence the frontier proceeded like the circumference of a circle with Kuwait town as its centre and with a radius of just over forty miles till it met the Gulf just south of Ras al Qalia. This was the true border of the Kuwait principality.

FIXING FRONTIERS IN THE DESERT

But a second area was declared neutral: the Governments of Najd and Kuwait were to have equal rights in it. This area started at the point where Kuwait's southern frontier struck parallel 29, and ran first south-south-east and then due east till it struck the coast at a point forty miles south of Ras al Qalia.

The Kuwait-Iraq frontier was subsequently delimited and was finally ratified in April, 1923. By means of all these agreements the hitherto vague position of Kuwait, which actually was a danger to all concerned, was made plain. Kuwait's sphere of tribal influence was taken away, but compensation was awarded.

Theoretically, the compromise between the three States was perfect. There were many, however, to doubt the principle involved, namely, that of having in the desert any hard and fast frontier. Such critics were to profess considerable justification of their fears in 1928, when the Iraqi-Najdi frontier was aflame and rumours of a 'Holy War' by Najd on Iraq ran through the bazaars like a frightening flash.

The security of Iraq from *Ikhwan* attack had been achieved — on paper. But from 1922 onwards could be observed a hardening of Iraqi opinion against the Wahhabis, an antagonism due not so much to the fact that the King of Iraq was a member of the Sharifian family — though that accounted for something — as to the fact that the majority of Iraq's population was

I B N S A ' U D

Shiah and, therefore, particularly susceptible to fear and hatred of the descendants of those who had pillaged their Holy Cities at the beginning of the previous century. The Shiahhs execrated the Wahhabis; and scarcely less bitter, at any rate for a time, was their attitude to the British and Sunni Iraqis who had consented to parley with the zealots of Najd.

But the Wahhabis and the Mandatory Power for Iraq were officially on cordial terms. In August, 1922, Ibn Sa'ud even sent a letter to the High Commissioner merely to deny a report that the Wahhabis had signed a treaty with the French in Syria. He asked Sir Percy Cox to assure King George of his sincerity and friendship.

CHAPTER XIV

STORM CLOUDS IN THE DESERT

Extension in the North-West — Jauf and Wadi Sirhan — Difficulties with Transjordan — The Kuwait Conference — 1911—1924

THERE may be a tendency to assume that, since Fate had proved so kindly to Ibn Sa‘ud up to the year 1921, the rest of the Peninsula would be quite ready to follow the lead of Hail and bow down before him. That was not so. The loyalty of the Badawin may be a fickle thing, at the bidding of whoever happens to be the strongest man of the moment; but the settled folk have stouter loyalties, and need either reason or force for their conversion.

It is true, however, that, being about to shut up his north-eastern frontier, that contiguous with Kuwait and Iraq, and seeking to consolidate his position elsewhere in the Peninsula, Ibn Sa‘ud found the ground not too difficult. He was at this time particularly concerned over the situation created by the establishment of the Amirate of Transjordan, which the British had devised as a sop to the eldest son of the Sharif Husain, Abdullah. In 1920, it will be remembered,

this jovial Arab had had himself elected King of Iraq: the throne that went next year to his brother, Faisal. But after the Amir Faisal had been ejected from Syria by the French, who defeated his forces at the battle of Khan Maisaloun (July, 1920) the state of Syria was fluid. Eventually it was decided by the Allies to allow the French to remain in supreme control where Faisal had formerly and briefly ruled, with the exception of a strip of territory east of the Jordan. This, in February, 1921, was granted to the Amir Abdullah, with Great Britain as Mandatory Power.

Now this move was important from the Wahhabis' point of view, for Ibn Sa'ud already had his eye on the communications of his State with Syria. The key to these was held, partly, at any rate, by Nuri Sha'lan of the Ruwala, who was at this time in possession of the Jauf district and the salt villages of the Wadi Sirhan. He had had them once before, had relinquished them to the Rashids of Hail, and once again possessed them after the fall of Hail to the Wahhabis. Yet Wahhabi propaganda did not fail to make way into these coveted territories; certainly Ibn Sa'ud claimed them as being an integral part of the conquered Hail domain.

Nuri Sha'lan himself was too old and too fond of pleasure to be ambitious: he had come to terms with the French in Syria, and he was ready to come to terms with the British in Transjordan. And so when,

STORM CLOUDS IN THE DESERT

in the spring of 1922, Nuri was visited by a representative of the Transjordan Government, accompanied by the British Representative in Transjordan (none other than Mr. H. St. John Philby, who in 1917 and 1918 had been at Ibn Sa'ud's Court at Riyadh and in 1919 had accompanied the Wahhabi Prince, Faisal, to London), he minded little their plan to 'annex' the Ruwala country, including Jauf and Sakaka, to Transjordan.

Such a step did not suit the book of Ibn Sa'ud. Raiding parties were sent up to Jauf, and Nuri's allegiance was demanded by the Wahhabi leader in terms that could scarcely be gainsaid. To make assurance doubly sure, a pro-Wahhabi revolt was instigated at Sakaka (the biggest village in the Jauf oasis), and a Wahhabi force was dispatched to help it. Opposition to such determination was half-hearted, and by July, 1922, the oasis was incorporated into the Wahhabi realm.

This advance of Wahhabi territory was mainly strategic in purpose, if potentially commercial, but it did bring the Najdi tribesmen much closer to 'civilization'. Would they be able to resist the lure of the 'sown' and the booty it contained? Could the *Ikhwan*, now hundreds of miles away from Riyadh, be held back from dangerous raiding?

The temptation was too great. Only in the next month, a large force, a thousand strong, marched up to Qasr al Azraq, that Roman outpost which appears

vividly in the pages of 'T. E. Lawrence'. Thence they raided westwards, these terrible, merciless *Ikhwan*.

Their victims were to be the powerful Bani Sakhr tribe. Over the Hijaz Railway they poured, well into the territory of Transjordan. Fifteen miles east of Amman, the capital of the Amirate, was a little village of Tunaib; it comprised but thirty-five souls, men, women, and children. Of these, not a single life was spared . . . and the *Ikhwan* passed on to other conquests.

But an aeroplane had seen them. At once the pilot warned the headquarters of the Royal Air Force in Amman. The massacre of another village could not be prevented, but before the raiders could do more, both aeroplane and armoured car were on them. Joined by the Bani Sakhr tribesmen, the British inflicted on these Wahhabis such casualties as could not have been feared even in nightmares. Barely one Najdi trekked back to Central Arabia to tell of the horror of the skies.

It was the Wahhabis' first experience of combat by air, though it was not to be the last.

But the truth is that, where warning is given, the camel has no chance whatever against the aerial weapon. The whole control of the Arabian deserts has thus been revolutionized. Wireless communication and the aeroplane and armoured car between them will, eventually, result in a transformation of this barren land. That fact, apart from the great

STORM CLOUDS IN THE DESERT

personality of Ibn Sa'ud, must inform all opinion on the future of the Peninsula.

I draw attention to this Wahhabi raid in August, 1922, which, fortunately for those threatened by the *Ikhwan*, took place in the same year as British defensive control of mandated territories in Arabia was handed over by the military authorities to the Royal Air Force.¹ The coincidence was striking; its implications were certainly not lost on the Wahhabi authorities, who of course and with accepted sincerity disowned this gross attack on Transjordan.

There is no question, however, that the Wahhabis had no love for the Sharifian States of Iraq and Transjordan, which now dominated their whole northern border. They did not, plainly, trust the two sons of King Husain who were respectively ruling these States: and the distrust was mutual.

Grievances multiplied. Despite the Treaty of Muhammara and the Protocol of Uqair, Wahhabis collected revenue from tribes on the Iraqi side of the border, and the refugee Shammar abused their asylum by raiding the *Ikhwan*. There is no need to excuse or palliate the offences of any party: they were gross but — enjoyed by the attackers! The raiding went on.

It so happened that, in the early part of 1923,

¹ The actual decision to allot to the R.A.F. responsibility for the defence of the Middle East was taken at the Cairo Conference of 1921, over which Mr. Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, presided: but it did not become effective until 1922.

Ibn Sa'ud suffered from a severe illness, a factor which not only diminished his personal control of the Najdi tribesmen but also increased — particularly as reports of his actual death were circulated — the general unrest of Central Arabia.

Tempers were rising. Infuriated by an especially violent raid by the Shammar in June, 1923, Ibn Sa'ud demanded from Iraq the expulsion of these tribesmen, whom he always considered as rightly his subjects. The request was refused. King Husain, on the other hand, whose hopes of a treaty with the British still remained but hopes, grew more and more intransigent. He for his part suggested a settlement of Central Arabian problems by means of a relinquishment, by the Wahhabis, of all territory which had changed hands since the War! Such an offer was not only pathetic statesmanship, it was also extremely provocative to the Wahhabis.

Matters seemed to be making for an explosion; every desert was echoing with verbal thunder. In these circumstances, Sir Percy Cox tried to get the Sultan of Najd and the King of Iraq to meet. Neither monarch showed any enthusiasm for the proposal. But British diplomacy was patient. The fall of the leaf might bring what the bud could not. A few months later, in the autumn, and after Sir Percy Cox had left Iraq for good, the idea of a conference was again preferred — to be attended this time, in view of the altered circumstances, by representatives not

STORM CLOUDS IN THE DESERT

only of Iraq and Najd, but also of the Hijaz and Transjordan.

On this occasion British invitations proved mollifying; and on December 17th a conference assembled at Kuwait, with a former British Resident in the Persian Gulf, Lt.-Colonel S. G. Knox, presiding. But Sultan Ibn Sa'ud was not there, though he sent representatives. King Faisal was not there, though he also sent delegates. King Husain flatly refused to attend unless Ha'il and Khurma were ceded by the Wahhabis, although, later on, he characteristically talked of sending his fourth son, the Amir Zaid, with no powers of discretion. The Amir Abdullah, though wishing to follow his obdurate father's lead, was overborne and finally sent a delegation from Amman to Kuwait.

The conference was a failure, but not for want of trying by those who instigated it. Twice it was adjourned — on December 27th, 1923, and January 26th, 1924 — and twice it was reassembled. Feelings between Wahhabis and Sharifians were strong, and mere adjournment could not cool the passions roused. The Iraqi delegates, for example, would agree to no settlement with Najd unless there were at the same time a Najdi settlement with the Hijaz — which was unrepresented! This was scarcely helpful. The Najdis, on the other hand, refused, what the Iraqis accepted, the suggestion of a joint tribunal to settle disputes and control the movements of the tribes. Nor

I B N S A ' U D

could Najdis and Transjordanians find any agreement on the future of the Wadi Sirhan.

What finally wrecked the Conference — though it was previously manifest that no amicable arrangement between the parties concerned would be reached — was a fierce raid by the Mutair tribe, under Faisal al Duwish, on March 14th, 1924. *Ikhwān*, not less than two thousand strong, raided from Amghar, a place neither in Iraq nor in Najd, but in the neutral zone between the two countries established by the Treaty of Muhammara. It was a thorough expedition, which cost Iraq 186 lives, over 26,000 sheep, and 3,700 donkeys. Indignation in Iraq was boundless, and the move was generally attributed to Ibn Sa'ud himself.

In face of this provocative act, undertaken at a moment when the Conference was actually due to reassemble, the Iraqi delegates went no more to parley with the Najdis. The Conference was dissolved on April 12. But Faisal al Duwish, a Badu of immemorial type, unteachable, untamable, took no heed of warnings. He raided yet again on May 31st.

The peace for which the British had striven was, it seemed, elusive; matters, indeed, were patently running awry. Every Sharifian left the Kuwait Conference more assured than hitherto of Wahhabi bad faith, every Wahhabi that the Sharifians were bent on circumscribing and humbling the Najdi State. It was a lamentable ending, and pointed, without a shadow of doubt, to war.

STORM CLOUDS IN THE DESERT

In the meantime, exactly those things had been happening in Western Arabia which would precipitate a crisis. King Husain, his subsidy at an end, his hopes of direct help from the British practically discomfited, resolved on a wholly new step to assert his authority: he would be Caliph of all Islam. It was his crowning folly. Before the end of 1924, his kingdom of the Hijaz would be but a memory, and his supplanter, that very Wahhabi whom, of all Arabs, he most despised and contemned.

EXIT KING HUSAIN

Arab Subsidies — Husain as Caliph — Wahhabis invade and overrun the Hijaz — Rulers once more of the Holy Cities— Fall of Jidda — 1924-1926.

WELL before the Kuwait Conference King Husain was a little fatigued of British diplomacy. The handsome golden subsidy — £200,000 a month — which he had received since his intervention in the War on the Allied side in 1916 had been continued until February, 1919. Thereafter his payments were reduced, though before they finally ceased in February, 1920, he had added to his never-too-full coffers another £1,200,000.¹

Actually, the discontinuance of this subsidy — about £6,000,000 in all — probably did as much as Husain's own difficult personality to dissipate his high dreams. For his war-time position among the Hijaz tribes he owed largely to judicious disbursements. Such processes are normal in Arabia: there is nothing of bribery in them. But when they were stopped, the

¹ Cf. this with the subsidy to Ibn Sa'ud of £5,000 a month. This, however, was paid to the Wahhabi not so much to do things as to refrain from doing them. It began in 1917 and continued until the end of March, 1924. Shortly after the stoppage of the subsidy came the invasion of the Hijaz. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, though not all-explaining, is applicable here.

EXIT KING HUSAIN

loyalty towards the Mecca Government of such important tribes as, say, the Harb and the Ataiba, stopped also.

It was the conversion of these two tribes, arising out of realization that nothing more was to be expected from the Mecca Exchequer, and assisted, certainly, by the forthright methods of the *Ikhwan*, that made the invasion of the Hijaz in 1924 comparatively easy for the Wahhabis. The Ataiba, in particular, are a 'key' tribe in Central Arabia.

But there were reasons, numerous and plain, for Ibn Sa'ud's determination to oust the Sharif from the Hijaz in 1924. Of these, more later.

King Husain had never recognized the Versailles Treaty: he consistently refused to recognize Article 22 (which lays down the principle of 'A' mandates for certain ex-Ottoman territories). As I have mentioned in an earlier chapter, Colonel 'T. E. Lawrence' tried to negotiate with him at Jidda at the end of 1921. But Husain simply would not consent to the exclusion of Syria and Palestine from the region the independence of which had, in his interpretation, been definitely promised by Great Britain. Argument and persuasiveness were fruitless. Fruitless also were the attempts of the Hashimite envoy in London, Dr. Najji al Asil, though these were continued all through 1923. The bone which stuck hardest in King Husain's gullet was that relating to Palestine and to the Zionist experiment therein — nor, it must honestly be

confessed, was he without sympathizers in finding this impossible to swallow. In any case, Husain, weary with the non-success of his London representative (a quite extraordinary choice, by the way) tried for himself direct contact with British officials in Palestine. He journeyed, for this purpose, to Amman, the capital of Transjordan and seat of the Amirate of his son, Abdullah. This was in January, 1924.

Now the Amir Abdullah kept a very shrewd eye on external politics. He knew beyond peradventure that the Angora Turks were about to abolish the Ottoman Caliphate: which historic act Mustafa Kemal Pasha did actually perform on March 3rd.

Here, thought Abdullah, was the very chance for reasserting the authority of the Sharifian family in the world of Islam. His father might have failed to impress the British authorities with the necessity of meeting his demands: but why should he not seek a wider tribunal? Why, in short, should he not be proclaimed Caliph? He possessed the attributes. Descended from the Prophet, from the famous Quraish tribe, Guardian of the Holy Places, the acknowledged King of Arabia — such were the descriptions which this astute Amir broadcast of his father.

Half-protestingly (for he was old and he knew that Indian Muslims had called him a traitor to Islam for having waged war against the Turks) Husain, who in 1915 might have rejoiced to take the title of Caliph, had the British had it in their power to bestow

EXIT KING HUSAIN

it at the time, accepted the honour. On March 5th, at the Transjordanian village of Shuna, he became *Amir al Muminin*.

Transjordan noted the act, and Palestine, Syria and Iraq, and, of course, his own Hijaz. Elsewhere there was silence. Had the old King forebodings? At the end of March he left Amman for Mecca. It was to be his last Pilgrimage.

But if Husain had at once elation and sense of unique responsibility, Ibn Sa‘ud simultaneously had fury and a similar sense of responsibility. To the Wahhabi, this presumptuous taking of the title of Caliph was the last straw in a veritable haystack of provocation. The die was now cast: the Holy Land of Islam must forthwith be purged of so inexhaustible a maker of mischief.

There was, in this spring of 1924, nothing to restrain Ibn Sa‘ud. His subsidy from the British, designed and continued to prevent him from aggression on other Arabs in friendly relations with the Empire, had been paid as up to the end of March: there was no more coming from this source. The breakdown of the Kuwait Conference, with its increasing of Wahhabian-Sharifian suspicion, left all Arabia in bad temper. Najdi tribes, in particular, were ripe for action: were war now to be declared, there would be no more willing agents than the *Ikhwan*. Adventure called as duty demanded; physical and spiritual exultation coincided.

I say spiritual exultation, for Ibn Sa'ud had grounds other than those purely material or economic for attacking the Hijaz in 1924. His religious sense, the religious sense of the mass of his people, was profoundly shocked by the administration of the Sharif. The Wahhabis had been prevented for three successive years from making the Pilgrimage to Mecca, for fear of provocation between Puritan and less ascetic Muslim in the Holy City. And when, in 1923, some Wahhabis actually did go to Mecca, the Holy City was disgraced by a bloody fracas between Najdis and Hijazis. Such a state of affairs was insupportable, a humiliation to Islam itself.

Less than two months after Husain had become 'Commander of the Faithful', the Sultan of Najd issued a proclamation in which he ridiculed Husain's claims, not only to the Caliphate, but also to the leadership of the Arab world. 'We,' he said, 'we Najdis are the Arabs'. He thereupon summoned at Riyadh a great congress of the military and religious leaders in Najd, to determine what action should be taken in face of this last impious act of the Sharif. This congress, presided over by Ibn Sa'ud's aged father, Abdur Rahman, met to consider primarily two petitions: one from the *Ikhwan*, demanding a *ghazzu*, or raid, and another for settling the question of Najdis and the Pilgrimage. The *Ikhwan* were in no yielding mood: they bluntly informed their Sultan that, with or without his permission, they would make

EXIT KING HUSAIN

the Pilgrimage, and if the Sharif showed opposition to them as Wahhabis, they would enter the Holy City by force.

Ibn Sa‘ud then showed a supreme sense of tactics: this crisis revealed the man. He knew well his *Ikhwan* and the kind of reputation in the Islamic world the Wahhabis would get were these fanatical militants allowed uncontrolled access to the Hijaz. Once more, therefore, he forbade the Pilgrimage, explaining to his *Ikhwan* that they should go and take the Hijaz only as mandatories of the Islamic world, and that they particularly should not attack the Holy Cities in the Pilgrimage season.

This counsel — command, rather — was both sound and shrewd. It impressed considerably that section of the Muslim world, and especially India, which was not committed to a pro-Sharifian attitude. Muslims generally were aware of the insecurity of pilgrims under Husain’s regime and also of the laxity at Mecca, and when Ibn Sa‘ud finally decreed action against the Holy Land he did not fail to emphasize these two points.

The motive of the campaign on the Hijaz was, then, dual: the evacuation of the Hashimite Sharif and his family, and the purgation of the Holy Places and their return to a purer form of Islam.

By early autumn every man in Najd was ready for what was to be the Wahhabi’s ‘crowning mercy’. Ibn Sa‘ud had devised a clever scheme. His main forces

were to be concentrated at the border oases of Khurma and Turaba, whence a direct lunge at the heart of the Hijaz should be made. Simultaneously three diversions were to be made on other parts of the 'Sharifian front'. One was to cut the Hijaz Railway north of Medina, one to raid Transjordan, and one to raid Iraq. And supporting columns were to be sent to Qaf in the Wadi Sirhan and to Jauf.

The side-shows on the States of King Faisal and of the Amir Abdullah repaid the Wahhabis ill. In August the Wahhabis raided the Dhafir and Muntafiq tribes at Abu Ghar, and followed this attack up in December and January. But in January the Royal Air Force caught them. It was fortunate, from the Wahhabis' point of view, that their success in the Hijaz did not depend on their diversion against Iraq.

Still more fortunate was it that the move against Transjordan was accounted only a containing move. For there the *Ikhwan* met prompt and unequivocal disaster. This time their sudden approach, on August 14th, to the Hijaz Railway, by Ziza station, was noticed by shepherds. Warning was at once sent to Amman.

Out flew the vigilant R.A.F. The local Badawin were right. Here again were the camels, the green and white banners of these fanatics from Najd, wild with desire after trekking forty days from Central Arabia.

The *Ikhwan* had arrived very early in the morning, and had caught many Transjordanians still asleep.

EXIT KING HUSAIN

Such *mushraqin* awoke only in Paradise. The vile slaughter went on as during the previous raid; neither sex nor youth was spared.

Suddenly the Wahhabi looked up. They had been discovered, Bismillah! Bullets spat at them, bombs shattered among them. Precipitately they fled, were pursued, and shot down. Mile after mile they were chased into the desert, the hunters following in relays. Not until they had been chastised over a running fire of forty miles was the pursuit relinquished. From Qaf as far as Jauf was one long line of corpses.

The Bani Sakhr, who at first had been somewhat shy of resisting the *Ikhwan*, became very formidable when the R.A.F. were pursuing the invaders into 'the blue': their looting of the looters was complete.

Neither lack of success in Iraq nor bloody repulse in Transjordan, however, could overshadow the amazing success which Wahhabi troops now had with the Hijaz. The great Ataiba tribe it was, under a leader since become notorious, Sultan ibn Bijad, who unlocked the door of the Holy Land by his capture of Taif in early September.

This came about in a curiously haphazard way, without even a battle. The Wahhabis had crossed the border on August 29th and at once selected, as their first point of attack, Taif, the pleasantest place in the Hijaz, the summer resort of the rich. Thither the eldest of Husain's sons, the Amir Ali, had marched, and in it, finding the neighbouring tribes, to say the

least, lukewarm in their deference to the Sharif, he placed a garrison. He himself withdrew to Hadda, in the Taif mountains some twenty miles away to the north-west. But the people of Taif did not like this garrison, nor the departure of Ali with the main force. They therefore showed the white flag and on September 5th opened the city gates.

Such fortune the eager Wahhabis did not expect. In rushed their advance-guard, led by the impetuous Khalid ibn Luwai, the hero of Khurma. In error a shot seems to have been fired at the incomers, but whether for that reason or not a most savage massacre began. Slaughtering or looting, these wild Ataiba went through the town, butchering women and children, as well as men. Not even nightfall could appease their ferocious lust, and the shrieks of the dying lasted till dawn. A hundred years, it appeared, had made not the slightest difference to the essentially feral instincts of these Wahhabis.

Not until next afternoon came relief. Then the head of the tribe, Sultan ibn Bijad — head also of the *Ikhwan* settlement of Ghatghat — arrived and stopped the massacre.¹ It was the most unfortunate prelude conceivable for the Wahhabis' conquest of the Holy Land in the name of Islam.

All roads now led to Mecca, both for the Wahhabis

¹ Philby, in his *Arabia* (page 305) states that only some three hundred persons were butchered at Taif. It has been suggested that exaggerated accounts were sent out as propaganda by Sharifian messengers. Probably; but the minimum truth was horrible enough.

EXIT KING HUSAIN

and for the Hijazis fleeing from the wrath to come. But Ibn Sa'ud, as soon as he heard of the conduct of his followers at Taif, sent peremptory orders of restraint: at all costs the invaders were to avoid casualties in the neighbourhood of the Holy City.

As a matter of fact these injunctions were obeyed, not so much because of any belated sense of clemency among the *Ikhwan* as because resistance by the Hijazis was negligible. Some sort of opposition was displayed by the Amir Ali at Hadda, but the enthusiasm for a fight was entirely one-sided, and Ali fled to Mecca.

There, in his capital raged Husain. He had called on the British, his ally during the Great War, to aid him in his hour of extremity. In vain; the Caliph of Islam, deserted by his own subjects, deserted by his erstwhile friends, now stood alone, though still unafraid. The brave old man, spurning to see his defeated son, Ali, bade him pass on to Jidda. Though all the world should fail him, he would not surrender.

Pathos, even a touch of greatness, there was in these last few days of Husain. But he, too, was bidden pass on, and by his own loyalest subjects. They perceived clearly that no alternative existed between his abdication and, without sympathy from abroad, the violent overrunning of the Hijaz by the Wahhabis. For some days he resisted their importunate proposals, but finally saw there was no other way. On October 3rd, he abdicated in favour of his son, Ali. Eight years he had

ruled, or misruled, in the Hijaz; and now the Hijaz was to know him no more.

'Few,' says Burke, 'are the friends of a departed tyranny,' and if Husain's going caused a crocodile tear or two in the Hijaz, it caused none in the world outside: certainly not in Whitehall. Despite the agonized appeals from Mecca and Jidda for assistance, the British Government proclaimed its inflexible neutrality in this conflict between two Arab monarchs. All other foreign Governments followed this example. It was perhaps, fortunate, in the event that Husain had proved so intractable a negotiator in the matter of an Anglo-Hijazi Treaty.

The Amir Ali, now King in place of his father, at once saw that any defence of Mecca was impracticable. He evacuated the Holy City on October 15th, and hard on his heels came the Wahhabi forces, under Khalid ibn Luwai.

For a second time in history the Wahhabis stood as conquerors of Mecca.

But the restraining orders of Ibn Sa'ud now had effect: there was neither slaughter nor looting. The Wahhabi Sultan had, moreover, heard from the British Government protesting against the Taif butchery, and he had decided that any further advance into the Hijaz should be under his personal control. At once in Mecca, therefore, security was proclaimed for all, and a temporary administration was set up by Sultan ibn Bijad.

EXIT KING HUSAIN

Yet before Ibn Sa'ud could arrive, the old iconoclastic urge of the Wahhabis had set in. If they were to spare 'infidel' lives, they would not spare 'infidel' practices. The various tombs and places of visitation with which Mecca and its neighbourhood abounded were destroyed, and ritual exercises which to the Wahhabis seemed nought but idolatry were ruthlessly forbidden. Once more the cry of desecration went round the Muslim world; once more, in particular, the Shiahs of Persia and India stood aghast. Only too ready, in fact, were Muslims all over the world to believe the worst of the Wahhabis. But against such indignation the Wahhabis, basing their actions on the Quran and the Traditions, showed little concern. And when, on December 5th, Ibn Sa'ud himself arrived in Mecca, dressed as a humble pilgrim in his *ihram*,¹ he found little done by his subordinates to earn his disapproval. Infinitely more diplomatic and conciliatory than his forbears of the previous centuries, Ibn Sa'ud was well content to await the informed verdict of Islam upon the purification of Mecca by his advance-guard.

To show the nature of Husain's hold on the affections of his people, the Hijaz now busied itself in surrendering to the conqueror. The Amir Ali had retired on Jidda, which, together with Medina and the port of Yanbu, was all that remained of the Sharif's diminished kingdom. Into this town, which the

¹ The two seamless sheets which all *hajjis* have to wear when making the Pilgrimage.

British had bombarded from the sea in 1916 in order to free it from the Turk, were now poured almost all the men and munitions that the Hijazis could muster. Many Arabs who had fought in the Great War were found willing to help; they had not found the alternation of well-paid holiday and raid, during the world-struggle, so exhausting as had the Western nations with their bitter war of attrition. Trenches were dug round the town, and mines and barbed-wire defences were laid. Even some old aeroplanes, with Russian pilots, were chartered. To the external world such resolve seemed admirable; only those inside the place knew the procrastination of Ali, the emptiness of the military commander's boasts, the dissatisfaction of the unpaid troops and of the starved citizens.

Ibn Sa'ud was resolute that, come what might, the Hijaz must be purged *in toto* of Sharifian influence. A peace delegation that King Ali sent in November from Jidda to Mecca brought back the answer that only by such a purging would the Wahhabis be satisfied. There was, then, to be no relief; and the regular siege of Jidda began, on January 6th, 1925.

But to the conquering Sultan there was at this time one thing more important than the capture of Jidda: the putting of the Hijaz into such shape as to allow of the Pilgrimage. He was keenly conscious of the alarm which his invasion had spread among the Faithful, and he was extremely anxious to conciliate it. At once he realized that there was but one way of satisfactorily

EXIT KING HUSAIN

achieving this particular end, and that was for pilgrims to come to see for themselves what manner of man he was. Not only did he proclaim (October 16th, 1924) that he intended to convoke in Mecca a Grand Muslim Conference to decide on the future of the Hijaz but he also announced (February 25th, 1925) that, despite the fact that Husain's son was blockaded in Jidda, he would welcome pilgrims and guarantee their safety to Mecca from any one of the three ports of Rabigh, Lith or Qunfidha.

To secure such safety he had first to take drastic measures in the Hijaz. Here the tribesmen — and especially the powerful Harb tribe — had long been wont to waylay the pilgrims and despoil them. So it had been in Turkish times, and so under King Husain. The tribes not unnaturally imagined that the privilege would continue; in fact, they told Ibn Sa'ud that it must continue. But Ibn Sa'ud had other ideas. Sending his *Ikhwan* among these lawless jackals, he dealt them such a lesson as they would never forget. Brutal though this pacification may have been, it was necessary and it was effective.

When a few thousand pilgrims did actually arrive in 1925 they discovered that what Ibn Sa'ud had said was true: they were not sprung upon by the thieving Badawin, and they were allowed to carry out their rites in Mecca undisturbed.¹

¹ For a description of Mecca under Wahhabi rule at this time see Eldon Rutter's *Holy Cities of Arabia*.

I B N S A ' U D

With the Pilgrimage safely over, it was time to resume the conquest of the Hijaz. First, there was the second holiest city in Islam, Medina, to be won. For the place containing the Tomb of the Prophet as such, the Wahhabis cared not at all: it held no place in their form of the Pilgrimage. But Ibn Sa'ud knew that he was fighting, not only a few hundred Hijazis, but a mighty army of propagandists. He now had detailed control of operations. Where his ancestors would have rushed in like fools, he chose to tread warily.

In August, he gave the move to march against Medina. By the twenty-fifth of that month the Hijazi Government had spread the news that the Tomb of the Prophet was being destroyed by gunfire. The Wahhabis' denial could not overtake the report, and once again the Islamic world shuddered. Individual Muslim monarchs vied with each other in their solicitude over the fate of Medina, and more than one Muslim commission of inquiry was sent to the Hijaz to report. It was the Persian commission which discovered, towards the end of 1925, that five bullet-holes had been made in the green-domed Mosque of Medina.¹

Medina finally capitulated on December 5th, and the port of Yanbu was in Wahhabi hands by December 1st.

Jidda itself, moreover, was about to yield. Through

¹ Containing the Tomb of the Prophet Muhammad.

EXIT KING HUSAIN

the offices of the British Agency Ali sent to Ibn Sa'ud proposals for an armistice. He would abdicate and leave the country, provided that the defending troops were repatriated and that the fanatical *Ikhwan* were kept outside the town. These terms were agreeable to the Sultan. On December 18th the 'King of Arabia' informed the Foreign Consuls of his abdication; on the following day the Wahhabis were in the port. Three days later the ex-King was on his way, via Aden, to Iraq, where he has since lived with his brother, King Faisal, for whom he occasionally acts as Regent.

And on Christmas Day, 1925, the Sultan of the Wahhabis, his voice ringing with pride of achievement, yet mellowed by sense of heavy responsibility, told the gathered foreign representatives that the long war was over.

'I bring peace and justice,' he said, 'and Islam shall decide.'

From Persian Gulf to Red Sea the tenacious Wahhabi had now been victorious, though the Islamic world might in part have turned grey in the process. The Sharifians in the Peninsula were no more, nor did sighs or regrets speed their going. Arabia was tired: it wanted reconciliation. External doubts of the new regime there might be. But the Foreign Consuls, glancing up at the green banner of the Wahhabi monarch fluttering in the fitful Red Sea breeze, were not alarmed. For they had reliable information. They had judged aright the conquering Puritan.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SULTAN BECOMES A KING

The Sharif Husain — Wahhabi Problems — Treaties of Bahra and Hadda — Ibn Sa‘ud as King — 1925–1926

THE subsequent history of King Husain concerns the career of Ibn Sa‘ud in one particular only. The unhappy Sharif, having abdicated in October, 1924, chose not to stay on the order of his going. From Mecca, on October 9th, he drove to Jidda, his car well armed against any possible demonstration by his ingrate subjects. Nor did he linger in Jidda. Before a week was out, he had embarked, accompanied by his numerous family and his even more numerous boxes of gold, in his private steam-yacht for Aqaba, at the head of the Red Sea. He did not take up residence in the town, but lay off-shore.

His presence there, however, was considered by the British authorities as likely to constitute an incitement for further Wahhabi attacks in this region, and since the Maan-Aqaba area, hitherto unclaimed specifically but now seen to be a district of potential conflict, had been officially announced as belonging to the mandated state of Transjordan, the British Government thought it necessary to remove Husain. The infuriated old

THE SULTAN BECOMES A KING

King not only disliked the 'annexation' of the Maan-Aqaba area, but also curtly rejected the proposal to remove him.

At last, in June, 1925, he consented, and was taken to Nicosia, in Cyprus. In this quiet backwater, with but his family and his steeds to comfort him, he lived until the beginning of 1931, when he went to pay a visit to his son, the Amir Abdullah, in Amman. There he died, on June 4th. He was buried with considerable ceremony outside the western wall of the Haram ash Sharif in Jerusalem.

These last years of Husain were of importance to the Wahhabis only, as I say, because they brought up sharply the problem of the frontier between Transjordan and Najd. Both Husain and Ibn Sa'ud looked upon the Aqaba-Maan region as an integral part of the Hijaz, though the British showed themselves unwilling to accept this view. Return will be made to the point later in this chapter.

When Ibn Sa'ud determined upon the conquest of the Hijaz he rightly foresaw the repercussions that it would have in the world of Islam. He therefore did his utmost to forestall hostile criticism before embarking on his campaign. His Wahhabis, he declared to the Muslim world, were no mere sectarians:

'Like you (he said) we are Mussulmans, Believers in the one God, accepting the religion of Muhammad. Beware then lest the Sharif Husain deceive

IBN SA‘UD

you, so that you give him either men or money. You have before you only brothers in Allah.'¹

In later proclamations, Ibn Sa‘ud emphasized again and again that it was only his duty to God which led him to compass the purgation of the Hijaz. Immediately after the Wahhabis' occupation of Mecca, for instance, Ibn Sa‘ud declared (October 16th, 1924) that the Najdis had no intention of annexing the Hijaz but would leave the future regime of the Holy Land of Islam to be decided by the Islamic world in conference.

A few weeks later he addressed from Riyadh a manifesto to the Muslim world. In this he said:

'Our forces entered Mecca on October 14th, 1924. We are pleased with the respect they have shown towards the Sacred House of God. They might have forced their way thither, but rather than profane the holy neighbourhood with bloodshed they have remained inactive.

'Now that the regime of injustice and tyranny is over, our most cherished desire is that the sacred home of Islam be open to all Mussulmans, and that the Holy Places have a status fixed by the whole Muslim world. We ourselves will go to Mecca, where we shall await the representatives whom we pray our Muslim brethren from the entire world to dispatch thither in order that this project may be realized.'

¹ Quoted in Jean Mélié's *Visages Royaux D'Orient*. Paris, 1930.

THE SULTAN BECOMES A KING

In repeated messages Ibn Sa'ud declared his purpose of restoring the liberty of the Pilgrimage and of convoking a Muslim Conference to determine the future administration of the Holy Places.

To this idealistic conception the response at first was disappointing. There was no Muslim congress in 1924 in Mecca. An Indian delegation, comprising men whose spiritual activities had frequently taken on a political tinge, had arrived at Jidda in December, 1924, but did little, either to help or to hurt Ibn Sa'ud's ambitions. And all through the year 1925 there were manifestations of the doubts which non-Wahhabi Muslims entertained upon the new conquerors of the Hijaz. Yet in the Hijaz itself the personality of Ibn Sa'ud was indubitably winning converts: his entry into the Holy City as a plain pilgrim, the equal of all brothers in Muhammad, had made a considerable impression.

The conciliation of foreign opinion, however, was another matter. In the political sense, a new understanding with the British mandated territories was for the Wahhabis the most urgent. Just as Ibn Sa'ud's capture of Ha'il in 1921 had upset the existing balance of Central Arabia, so this conquest of the Hijaz in 1924-1925 raised anew the problem of frontiers between the land of the Wahhabis and the mandated lands of Iraq and Transjordan. The disintegration of the Hijaz added tremendously to the prestige of the Sultan of Najd, but actually it provided to his followers little material

I B N S A ' U D

satisfaction. There was, therefore, represented in a fresh form the old fear that the *Ikhwan* would seek the richer countries of the north and start wholesale raiding on these mandated territories.

To forestall this possibility, the British Government in September, 1925, sent Sir Gilbert Clayton, formerly Chief Secretary in the Government of Palestine, to Jidda, in order that he might negotiate with Ibn Sa'ud on the Najd-Iraq and the Najd-Transjordan frontiers.

With this British envoy the Wahhabi monarch immediately struck up a friendship, which ended only with the Englishman's death in Baghdad in 1929. Ibn Sa'ud showed great tact and statesmanship at this critical point in his career. He wished at first to have his country conterminous with Syria — more for commercial than for any other reasons — but that development was one of the things which Sir Gilbert Clayton had journeyed particularly to avoid. At all costs the British wanted a continuous line of territory from the Mediterranean to Iraq: in other words, Transjordan and Iraq must be unbroken in contact.

In the event, a compromise was reached. What is known as the Hadda Agreement was signed on November 2nd, at Ibn Sa'ud's camp at Bahra. A corridor was drawn about sixty miles wide connecting Transjordan and Iraq, and separating Najd from Syria, but the British Government undertook to secure — that which Ibn Sa'ud most wanted — freedom of transit at all times to Najdi merchants travelling to

THE SULTAN BECOMES A KING

or from Syria. Another clause in this Agreement gave to Najd all the Wadi Sirhan except the extreme northwest end. This decision ended the dispute over whether Nuri Sha'lan and his Ruwala should or should not be subjects of Najd: Ibn Sa'ud had won his point.

At the same time and in the same place another pact — the Bahra Agreement — was signed, regulating the Najd-Iraq frontier. The two agreements had much in common, as, indeed, was natural, seeing that the main object was the prevention of raiding. In both of them, raiding was stigmatized as an aggression for which the Government under whose jurisdiction the raiding tribe existed had to allot penalty. Special tribunals were to be established to inquire into tribal raids. Tribes were not to cross the international frontiers without the sanction of the Governments on both sides of the line, but if migration were due to grazing necessities, sanction should not be withheld.

By means of these and other provisions an honest and comprehensive attempt was made to constitute a tribal regime for Iraq, Transjordan, and Najd frontiers.

One point alone was left unsolved: that relating to the incorporation of the Aqaba-Maan district in the Amirate of Transjordan. On this Ibn Sa'ud would not give way, but he was willing, for the sake of the advantages gained in the other parts of the treaties, to leave the matter open.

In effect, these two agreements reflected both acute diplomacy and loyal desire to work for peace in Arabia. They were a compromise, inevitably; a mixture of the traditional law of the desert with international law could not be effected otherwise. The cause neither of Arab independence nor of British Imperial interests was harmed by these two pacts, which succeeded not only in completing the work which the abortive Kuwait Conference of 1923-1924 had aimed at accomplishing, but also put on a much friendlier footing relations between the Wahhabi Sultan and the British Empire, with its mandated Arab territories.

Ibn Sa'ud was gratified. He had secured certain disputed points; he had finally yielded none. He could feel himself a not unworthy pupil in diplomacy of Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait, dead some ten years previously.

But other things awaited solution, and of these the most delicate was the reorganization of the Wahhabis' position in the Hijaz. From the beginning Ibn Sa'ud recognized that he could not merely eject the Sharif and reign as conqueror in his stead. His personal ambition must be secondary. Only a week before his negotiations with Sir Gilbert Clayton he had reiterated his desire to be regarded merely as the servant of the Muslims in general. In a circular note addressed to the Governments of Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Persia, he declared:

THE SULTAN BECOMES A KING

'I did not desire to make myself master of the Hijaz or to take dominion over it. The Hijaz is a trust placed in my hands until the moment when the Hijazis shall elect a ruler from among themselves — a ruler who shall regard himself as a servant of the Islamic world and shall work under the control of the Muslim peoples.'

Before the end of 1925, as has been seen, the whole of the Hijaz had surrendered: Ibn Sa'ud was in effect the head of a Dual Monarchy — the Hijaz-Najd. Should he, in deference to divergent Islamic opinion, remain head *de facto* only? Such a course was quite impracticable for a realist ruler. He had already seen something of the vague, inapplicable ideas which eminent though irresponsible non-Arab Muslims had put forward for the governance of the Holy Land of Islam. Delay was dangerous and uncongenial. Swiftly he resolved to act.

This resolution assumed a democratic form. The notables of Mecca, taking their cue from Ibn Sa'ud's declaration that the Hijaz should belong to the Hijazis, met in council to decide that the office of King of the Hijaz should be conferred upon the Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies, on condition that he governed in accordance with the Quran, the *Sunna* of Muhammad, and the conduct of the earliest Muslims.

Such conditions might have been laid down by the Wahhabi leader himself, and on January 8th, 1926, in

the Great Mosque at Mecca, he was hailed as King. No great pomp attended the acclamation; in any case the occasion was too solemn for the glorification of a mere man in the Holy City. Instead, the citizens simply filed past their new King, swearing their allegiance to him, and he his to the sacred law of God, the *Shar'*. Very definitely he proclaimed his intention to rule justly, to make no distinction between great and small.

He still regarded himself as bound by the pledge he had previously given regarding the rights possessed by Muslims in the Holy Places; he still asseverated that he would rule, not as an absolute monarch, but as the agent of Islamic opinion. He would provide the Hijaz with a Constitution, pending which he instituted a Provisional Government, with his second son, the Amir Faisal, as President. Thus carefully did he take his first steps as ruler of the Holy Places, not, be it noted, under the title of 'King of All the Arabs', or 'King of Arabia' such as Husain had assumed, but simply 'King of the Hijaz'.

And as such, he came into direct contact, not only with every Muslim Power or community, but also with the many foreign Powers who were represented at Jidda. In other words, he was entering the comity of nations.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT MECCA

Nature of Wahhabism — Anxieties of Islam — Grand Muslim Conference at Mecca — The Pilgrimage — Ibn Sa‘ud's Final Authority — 1926

WITH Ibn Sa‘ud's becoming a factor in world politics, it is convenient here to interrupt the narrative of his biography and to set out what is really represented by the faith for which he and his followers stand. The account given in chapter III of the excesses committed by the first Wahhabi Empire sufficiently explains the anxieties born among that section of the Muslim world which lacked first-hand information upon this second Wahhabi Empire; and in chapter VII have been noted some of the differences separating Wahhabis from other Muslims. But Wahhabism from now onwards had an extra-Muslim significance; its durability was no longer the sole concern of the Faithful.

Wahhabism is in essence an attempt to carry out the practices and pure dogmas of the Prophet Muhammad, a return to the first principles of Islam: nothing more nor less than that. It is not a new religion; it is not, in the widest sense, a sectarian

movement. 'Not a single new precept', said J. L. Burckhardt,¹ who saw the Wahhabis of the First Empire at work in the Holy Cities of Arabia, 'was to be found in the Wahaby code.' It is simply an urge (not unknown in other faiths) to get back to the simpler, purer mode of worship and living of the earliest days of Islam.

When the Islamic faith — a typically Semitic religion — spread, in the seventh and following centuries, outside the confines of the Arabian Peninsula, it naturally became affected by the less rigorous conditions which it encountered in the more civilized lands of Asia and Africa. Accretions were added; abuses crept in. Various schools arose, and sects multiplied. Not until the fourteenth century, however, did the preacher come who may be said really to have been the father of the Wahhabi movement. This was the renowned Muslim theologian, Shaikh ibn Taimiyya of Syria. He and his school professed the Hanbalite creed, and it was his writings which Muhammad Abdul Wahhab studied and promulgated in eighteenth-century Arabia as containing the true interpretation of Muslim doctrine. Ibn Taimiyya was the most indefatigable and intolerant of heresy-hunters, the detector *par excellence* of excrescences and deteriorations, and the mantle both of his learning and of his intransigence has descended upon his Najdi followers of to-day.

The career of Ibn Taimiyya has been compared

¹ In his *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys*. London, 1831.

THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT MECCA

with that of Luther.¹ It is true that both reformers attacked mercilessly the conception that understanding was reserved to the priests and that intercession was permissible; it is true also that their respective followers showed violence towards others of their faith who thought differently. That blessed word 'emancipation' was the slogan of each.

Parallels between Christian and Islamic movements should not, however, be pressed too hard, for the material conditions governing each were utterly different. The Protestant impulse in the West was supported for political and racial as well as for spiritual reasons, whereas no such condition was present in eighteenth-century Arabia. Rather were nearly all the political factors opposed to the Wahhabis.

This circumstance, however, did not affect Abdul Wahhab. He burned with the faith that was in him. To restore the golden age of the Prophet, all sources of revelation must, in his teaching, be discarded except the Quran and the early *Sunna* — the doings of Muhammad. He accepted the Quran literally, and condemned all innovations which Muslims had introduced in an endeavour to adapt Islam to the changing conditions of the world. Mosques, for example, must be made as they were at the time of the Prophet, without minarets, without mosaics, and without gilding. The worship of relics and the use of rosary were unlawful.

¹ For instance, in a lecture to the Royal Central Asian Society on 'Wahhabism in Arabia: Past and Present', by Shaikh Hafidh Wahba. The Society's *Journal*, Vol. XVI. Part 4.

Lax moral practices, again, were roundly abjured by this Najdi Puritan. Whatever Ottoman Sultans, corrupted by contact with the West, might have authorized, this Arab reformer pronounced against such things as music, tobacco, and the wearing of silken apparel and golden jewellery by men. Nor did he hesitate to inveigh against such habits as praying at tombs, raising edifices on them, and so on: to him they savoured of polytheism.

When the reformer's ideas were adopted by the Sa'udi House, strict injunctions were laid down for the public execution of his rules of conduct. And when the first Wahhabis came into power they preserved rigorously both the spirit and the letter of this Puritanical code.

The present King Abdul Aziz is infinitely more tolerant of non-Wahhabis than were his predecessors, but, as the late Sir Thomas Arnold wrote:¹

‘The negligent are still publicly flogged for failure to take part in public worship in the mosques, and the rigid Puritanism of the Wahhabis not only prohibits the drinking of wine, but also the smoking of tobacco, and men are often flogged for the heinous offence of smoking a cigarette.’

King Ibn Sa'ud found it necessary, on April 23rd, 1926, to issue in Mecca a series of penal ordinances, in which were mentioned specifically non-attendance

¹ *The Islamic Faith*, p. 69.

THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT MECCA

at the Friday prayer, the smoking of tobacco, the consumption, sale, and manufacture of alcoholic beverages, and the freedom of meeting and speech. He also obtained from fifteen *ulama* of Medina a *fatwa* supporting the Najdis' campaign against idolatry.

Let it not be thought, therefore, that what is called twentieth-century enlightenment has descended on the Wahhabis to the extent of inducing them to renounce their fundamental tenets. True, concessions have been made under the present regime. The alleged ban on coffee, for example, does not now exist; and the treasure of the Prophet's Tomb at Medina has been respecified. Yet the Wahhabi creed still has prohibitions and inhibitions, as has every Puritanical faith. The problem arising out of that fact will be dealt with in a later chapter. Suffice it here to indicate that there are at work in Islam forces which, though not professedly Wahhabi, envisage ultimately a simple faith that has striking similarities to the desert creed.

But however the Wahhabis might justify their position, the Islamic world in general was perplexed by the situation presented by the conquerors of the Holy Land. In part these anxieties were historical; non-Wahhabis remembered vividly the outrages committed in the name of the first Empire. In part they were the result of Sharifian propaganda; the adherents of the fallen Hashimite possessed in a far greater degree than Ibn Sa'ud the ear of the civilized world. But added to these doubts was the complication

caused by the problem of the Caliphate. The Ottoman Caliphate, as had been previously noted, was abolished in March, 1924; the Arab Caliphate of Husain had been ended by the victory of the Wahhabis in the Hijaz. What if the new Guardian of the Holy Places were himself now to be proclaimed Caliph? Already a Muslim Congress had been summoned to meet in Cairo in May, 1926, to discuss the Caliphate.

Actually this last question was not troubling King Ibn Sa'ud: he had no designs on the historic office. True, he wished to restore in Arabia the conditions obtaining during the regimes of the first four Caliphs, but he realized from the first that, in the changed circumstances of the modern world, with Islam split beyond hope of geographical unity, a Caliph could be but a figure-head; and he had no desire for the mere shadows of power. He thought, moreover, that the Caliphate would be only a burden to whosoever might choose to fill the post; and in view of the fact that since the demission of Husain no other Caliph has been elected by the Faithful, his judgment must be held to have been correct.

But he knew well that he had not yet reconciled the Muslim world to his occupation of the Holy Places. He had very carefully defined his position in 1925, but that definition was apparently insufficient. It is, however, worth recording. Speaking at the close of the 1925 Pilgrimage, he declared on July 2nd, before a delegation of learned Indian Muslims:

THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT MECCA

'Before God and all Muslims I pledge myself to urge them to cleave to the old religion. My belief and my confession of faith are those of the pious ancestors; my rite (*Madhdhab*) is their rite. Whenever there is an explicit Quranic verse or an authentic *Hadith* or a prescription dating back to the first four Caliphs or confirmed by the unanimous conduct of the Companions of the Prophet: when agreement between the four Imams, founders of the juridical rites, can be established, or agreement among their successors, the *ulama*, without departing from the Quran and the *Sunna*, in all these cases I adopt no other belief but profess what our pious predecessors professed.'¹

This declaration was as astute as it was sincere; it opened the gates of sympathy towards the Wahhabis for many who hitherto had been hostile or suspicious. Yet the position of the Hijaz remained unregulated, and it was with a view to finally determining this that, on April 28th, 1926, King Ibn Sa'ud issued new invitations for a Grand Muslim Conference at Mecca in June. His circular telegram was sent to the independent countries of Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, and the Yaman; to the pseudo-independent countries of Egypt and Iraq; to the Amir Abdul Karim of the Rif in Morocco; to the Bey of Tunis; to the Supreme Muslim Council of Palestine; to the Central Religious

¹ Quoted in *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, by H. Lammens. S. J., p. 186.

Directorate for the Muslims of Soviet Russia; to three individual heads — two in Damascus and one in Algiers; and to five private associations — three in British India and two in the Dutch East Indies.

Thus was the Islamic world summoned for the joint purpose of determining the future of the Hijaz and of promoting the prosperity of the land and the security of Pilgrims. The delegates met on June 7th, over seventy of them, but almost all unofficial. There were worthy men among them, but unfortunately King Ibn Sa'ud did not know that the 'conference mind' in Islam is like unto its fellows elsewhere: it runs to doctrinaire and theoretical solutions. I cannot here summarize the results of this Grand Muslim Congress,¹ which, though it accomplished something, fell far short of the hopes held of it. The King of the Hijaz tried, not wholly without success, to keep international politics out of the discussion, and to confine debate to the agenda; but since in the East politics and religion are so closely combined, the original motive of the Conference was sometimes lost sight of and the ambitions of individual Muslim countries or Muslim communities substituted. More than once the Wahhabi authorities lost patience with the delegates; they had been particularly curt towards a proposal to make the Hijaz a Republic, governed by an international body of Muslims.

¹ Full details of this, as well as of the Cairo Caliphate Congress in the same year, are to be found in Achille Sékaly's *Le Congrès du Khilifat and le Congrès du Monde Musulman*. (Paris, 1926).

THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT MECCA

On July 7th the Congress dispersed, after having constituted itself a permanent organization which was to meet annually. Alas for its hopes of re-uniting!

The feelings of King Ibn Sa'ud as this Conference dragged out its meetings must have been similar to those of Cromwell towards those of the Rump Parliament of 1653. His relief at bidding these *conférenciers* farewell has since been shown in the non-convoking of this Mecca Congress. The delegates left the Hijaz, then, with their nice schemes of administration unaccepted, and Ibn Sa'ud with the actual work and responsibility. 'We did not hear a dog bark at their going!' said Cromwell of the dissolved Rump; nor is it to be presumed that any tears were spilled at the departure of the Muslim delegates. It was, to the outsider, at any rate, inconceivable from the beginning that these 'foreign' Muslims should be allowed to nullify the victory which the Wahhabis had gained in the Civil War of Arabia.

The truth is that Ibn Sa'ud, by having himself proclaimed King in January, had cut the ground from under the feet of such politically-minded delegates as journeyed to Mecca in June. Probably the Congress was a mistake.¹ Certainly a realist ruler and the conference mind go ill together.

But if Ibn Sa'ud saw faint hope of extracting any useful proposals from the Mecca Congress, he felt

¹ For a favourable view of the Conference method in Islam see *Whither Islam?* edited by H. A. R. Gibb.

heartened by the response which Islam in general made in 1926 to his invitation to resume the Pilgrimage. For the first time since the War was there now anything like a representative *Haj*. Some accounts, indeed, state that as many as a quarter of a million people were present at the culminating ceremony on Mount Arafat.¹ So long as he had the mass of the Faithful with him, as represented by these humble Pilgrims, Ibn Sa'ud could afford to dispense with or discount the advice or hostility offered him by non-Arab 'leaders' of Islam. He was not greatly perturbed even by the dispute which broke out in June, 1926, between the Egyptian *Mahmal* and his *Najdis* — a dispute which, involving, as it does, the *amour propre* both of the Hijaz Government and of the Egyptian Government, has not yet reached a solution.

He was, and he intended to remain, responsible for the well-being of the Hijaz; varying counsels of other Muslim authorities could be allowed to cancel each other out. It was sufficient for him that Pilgrims had seen with their own eyes that he had created peace and security where before had been only tyranny and theft.

¹ Thus Philby in his *Arabia* (p. 319). He estimates the overseas Pilgrims at 100,000. Others, however, place them at 60,000.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

Relations with Foreign Powers — Amir Faisal's Visit to Europe — Hijaz Constitution — King of Najd — Treaty of Jidda — Success of Pilgrimage — 1926—1927

IT has been stated in an earlier chapter that the non-Muslims representing their countries in Jidda were not long in making up their minds upon the new regime. Before the spring of 1926 was over, four countries which had large Muslim commitments — Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the U.S.S.R. — had officially recognized Ibn Sa'ud as King of the Hijaz. The greater number of pilgrims, indeed, came from the British Empire and from the Dutch East Indies, and it was, therefore, comforting to the Wahhabи leader to find British and Dutch cruisers paying complimentary visits to Jidda, there to give him a gun-salute. In face of such a commanding lead in recognition, other countries could not well withhold their testimony to the altered circumstances in Arabia, and among those States which soon afterwards similarly recognized Ibn Sa'ud were Turkey, Belgium, and Switzerland. Germany followed in 1929. Then came

certain Muslim countries which had previously been suspicious of the Wahhabis: Persia in 1930, Iraq in 1931, and the Yaman also in 1931. Italy, which for some time regarded her Treaty of 1926 with Ibn Sa'ud's erstwhile rival in the Yaman, the Imam Yahya, as a bar to regular relations with the Wahhabis, delayed making a treaty with the Puritan King until February, 1932. But now, of the lands with important interests in Arabia, Egypt alone remains unconvinced of the desirability of official diplomatic relations with the Wahhabi Empire.

In recognition of this prompt action of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands, King Ibn Sa'ud decided in the autumn of 1926 to send his son, the Amir Faisal, on a mission of courtesy to these three countries. This young Prince had already journeyed to Europe in 1919: but how different then was the state of his father's realm! At that time the ruler of Najd was but one of several voices in Arabia. The kingdom of Ibn Rashid of Hail still stood, nor was the downfall of Husain of the Hijaz even considered — except by the sagacious and overridden few. Now, however, Prince Faisal came as emissary of a man who had unmistakably asserted his dominance throughout the Peninsula, but for the two corners on the south-west and on the south-east — the Yaman and Oman.

He arrived in London on September 23rd, accompanied by the Foreign Secretary — a native of Mosul in the service of Ibn Sa'ud — Dr. Abdullah al Damluji,

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

and by the British Consul at Jidda, Mr. F. R. Jordan. His sojourn in England was for nearly three weeks, and before he left the King, who made him an honorary Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, bade him farewell at Buckingham Palace. From London he journeyed to Holland, where he was received by the Queen Wilhelmina, and then to France, to be received by the President of the Republic. He left Marseilles on October 29th, returning via Cairo to Jidda on November 9th.

The Amir Faisal, alone of the House of Sa'ud, has been outside Asia and Africa. His elder brother, the Amir Sa'ud, has visited Egypt, but the King himself has never been outside Arabia.

The grace of this tall, handsome Prince Faisal, so unlike his father physically in all but kingly bearing, had impressed the Europeans who had met him. Nor was his impressionable brain insensitive to the scientific civilization of the West. In England he had made aeroplane flights, and he quickly perceived the possibilities of aerial methods in Arabia. But though he returned to his own country filled with ideas, there were no concrete political results to his mission. It was patent, indeed, that all existing treaties with Ibn Sa'ud were out of date and needed revising in accordance with the changed status of the Wahhabis, but although the Amir had found European Governments willing to show recognition of the metamorphosis, he did not discover any immediate anxiety to bestow

higher diplomatic status on the various European official representatives in Jidda. He had not, however, journeyed primarily to negotiate.

But as soon as the Amir Faisal had returned to Arabia, the British representative entered into discussions with the Wahhabis for the purpose of a new Anglo-Wahhabi Treaty. The British Consul, Mr. Jordan, together with Mr. George Antonius, then of the Palestine Government (who had accompanied Sir Gilbert Clayton for the Treaties of Bahra and Hadda in 1925), attempted to thresh out the whole subject with King Ibn Sa'ud at a place called Abyar ibn Hassani, between Rabigh and Medina. The points at issue were many, political, commercial, and, in so far as Great Britain was a Mussulman Power, religious. Negotiations, however, proved sticky; larger questions had been raised than was anticipated by the British; and there was a feeling among the Wahhabis that some one of higher rank than the British Consul should conduct such important diplomatic affairs.

And so, disappointingly from both parties' point of view, discussions were in mid-December suspended — only, however, to be resumed on a far more hopeful basis in a few weeks' time.

But the interval did give to King Ibn Sa'ud the opportunity, which he had not had since his entry into Mecca at the end of 1924, of revisiting his vast domains to the eastwards. As soon as he had subdued the Hijaz to his will by means of his incomparable instrument,

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

the *Ikhwan*, he sent these fanatical warriors back to Najd. The lessons they had taught to the Hijazi tribes were sufficient, coupled with the King's powerful personality, to guarantee the security and the tranquillity of the Holy Land of Islam. And on the basis of that peace he had imposed a political façade on the Hijaz.

The year 1926 was indeed a memorable one for the Cradle of Islam. Not only was there the Grand Muslim Congress at Mecca, already mentioned, but there were also far-reaching political and administrative acts taken by Ibn Sa'ud both in anticipation of and consequent upon or despite that Congress.

Ibn Sa'ud, as has been seen, was resolved himself to be responsible for the purification of the Hijaz, above all to restore the rights of the Pilgrims there. But he had also promised some kind of democracy to the Hijaz: the Hijazis, he had said, should choose a ruler for themselves and so achieve virtual self-determination (though so astute a man as this Wahhabi would never have used a word so inapplicable to backward Oriental areas). As a preliminary fulfilment of this pledge, he established, in the spring of 1926, five local consultative councils, at Mecca, Medina, Jidda, Yanbu, and Taif, and a general consultative council to represent both urban and tribal opinion, the delegates being taken from the local councils and from the Badawin. But the Presidents of these councils were not elected, being nominated by the Government. The

idea of an Executive responsible to an electoral body had not permeated the consciousness of Arabia, and Ibn Sa'ud was not attempting to stir up any pathetic discontent among the masses.

Though the patriarchal system of governance which sufficed for Najd might be inadequate to the needs of the more advanced Hijaz, Ibn Sa'ud was not so impressed with the difference between the two countries as to forgo retention in his own hands of the real reins of power. Already in January, however, he had appointed a constituent body of fifty-one members (including three Najdis), and he had, as noted in chapter xvi, appointed his son Faisal as President of the Provisional Government. By August he had evolved a Constitution, which was duly promulgated on the twenty-sixth of this month in the official Mecca newspaper, *Umm al Qura*. By this, the governance of the Hijaz was placed in the Muslim Holy Law, of which the King was to be the agent and servant. The clauses of the Constitution may be summarized as follow:

1. The Kingdom of the Hijaz is one and indivisible. It is a consultative monarchy, Mussulman, enjoying full internal and external sovereignty. Mecca is the capital and Arabic the official language.
2. The whole administration of the Kingdom will be in the hands of His Majesty Abdul Aziz the First, son of Abdur Rahman, who is charged to respect the

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

Islamic law in carrying out the ordinances of the Book of God (the *Quran*), of the *Sunna* (words attributed to Muhammad and examples drawn from his life) and of the customs of the Companions of the Prophet. His Majesty the King will nominate a lieutenant-general, directors and heads to carry on State services. The personnel of the different services are responsible to the lieutenant-general, who in turn is responsible to the King.

3. There are six State Departments: Religion, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Public Instruction, and the Army.

4. A Grand Council will be set up in the capital consisting of the lieutenant-general and his counsellors, as well as six worthy and competent persons appointed by the King. Jidda and Medina shall each be provided with an administrative Council. Every Department and every tribe shall have its Council to administer local affairs.

In devising this Constitution Ibn Sa'ud had both an autocratic and a democratic aim. He was the sole authority, indeed, but he wanted at the same time to found his Wahhabi rule in the Hijaz on a democratic basis. Obviously, in so large a realm as the Hijaz and Najd now comprised, he could not be personally responsible for every action taken by subordinates, and it was to facilitate administration that he appointed his eldest son, the Amir Sa'ud, to be Viceroy of

I B N S A ' U D

Najd, and another son, Faisal, to be Viceroy of the Hijaz.

The Hijaz was of course the more intricate section of the Empire to administer, if only because through it all foreign affairs were conducted. The Viceroy was accordingly to be helped by two bodies, an Executive Council and an Advisory Council. This elected Advisory Council I have already mentioned. It consists of fourteen members, five from Mecca, three each from Jidda and Medina, one each from Yanbu and Taif, and, as President, the King's nominee. It is in permanent session.

In the Executive Council, a sort of Cabinet — are the Viceroy, who is both Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, the Minister of Finance, the Foreign Minister, and, as Vice-President without portfolio, the nominated President of the Advisory Council.

There are two points worth noting about this Executive Council. First, the King, as in most Oriental countries, retains supreme control of the Army. And secondly, the numbers are small partly for a reason applicable to most Arab countries — the fewness of qualified men. The first feature is self-explanatory: it is one likely long to endure in Arabia. All Oriental rulers, whether 'constitutional' in theory or not, endeavour to secure and conserve it. But the second constitutes a serious problem. So far Ibn Sa'ud has solved it by the simple process of importing Arabic-speaking Muslims. Thus his first Foreign Minister

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

was an Iraqi, Dr. Abdullah al Damluji, who, by the way, returned in 1928 to Iraq, in whose Government service he is now making another career. He was succeeded by a Syrian, Shaikh Fuad Hamza. Another man, who has occupied responsible official positions in the service of King Ibn Sa'ud is Shaikh Hafidh Wahba, an Egyptian who in 1930 was appointed to be the first Minister Plenipotentiary of Wahhabi Arabia to the Court of St. James's.

King Ibn Sa'ud has been fortunate in having attracted such men to his service, but it is patent that the education and training of more Hijazis and Najdis for high Government service are an urgent matter. So long as the towering personality of the King is at the disposal of the State, its administration may be efficient — the paucity of reliable advisers, in fact, makes his people look to and trust him all the more — but it is true of his domain as it is true of all dictatorial regimes that, unless he can evolve a system of governance capable of surviving the strain of his death, the possibility exists of much of his life's work being cast away. For Nature can scarcely be expected to throw up successively two men of the calibre of King Ibn Sa'ud.

Internal administration, however, was not the only concern of Ibn Sa'ud in this year of 1926. Apart from the regulating of his position *vis-à-vis* foreign nations, there were matters on his very borders which required attention. The undecided problem of the Maan

wilayat — whether its ‘annexation’ by Transjordan should or should not be acquiesced in — has already been noted. But on the south-western frontier also a delicate situation had arisen.

Between the Hijaz and the Yaman lay the province of Asir, the Idrisi of which had been the first Arab ruler actively to enter the War on the Allied side. This fact gave to the Asiris somewhat inflated notions of their own importance, and shortly after the War they began to expand, chiefly at the expense of the Yaman. Gradually, however, the Imam Yahya, whose contempt for most Arab rulers was not marked by any notable degree of qualification — he was and is a medieval theocrat — commenced to assert his rights in this no-man’s-land. By the spring of 1926 he had occupied the Southern Tihama, the coast containing the coveted ports of Hudaida and Luhaiya, and his forces were then actually besieging the two strongholds of the Idrisi’s State, Sabia and Jizan.

This attempted revenge by the Zaidi troops of the Yaman was not unnatural. None the less natural was it that the Idrisi, in his extremity, should appeal to the Wahhabis for succour. But the appeal fell on deaf, or, at any rate, unready ears. Yet the situation was serious. Here was the monarch with the best trained army in all Arabia advancing steadily northwards towards the Hijaz. Was there, then, to be war between the mountaineers of the Imam Yahya and the plainsmen of King Ibn Sa‘ud? The rumour was freely

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

reported, and it was sufficiently obvious, indeed, that it was but a question of time for the independence of Asir to be extinguished either by its southern or by its northern neighbour, or by both. To whom should it fall?

In the event, a compromise was reached. By means of the Najd-Asir Treaty of October 21st, 1926,¹ that portion of Asir which the Idrisi then held became virtually a Wahhabi protectorate, the remainder, which the Yamani troops had conquered, being allowed to rest in the invaders' hands. Possibly the contemporaneous treaty which the Imam Yahya hopefully signed with Italy had something to do with the cooling of his expansionist ardour implied in an acceptance of this position. The fact remains that the arrangement was accepted, and, despite an occasional recurrence of alarm, has persisted to this day. There is now, indeed, a treaty between the Yaman and Wahhabi Arabia, and all talk of war or struggle for hegemony between the two has vanished. Actually a war between the plainsmen of Najd and the mountaineers of 'Arabia Felix' would be as a war between the elephant and the whale: neither side could hold to any large conquest, and the only ultimate victor would be the climate.

But if the frontiers of the vast Empire needed scrutiny, what of cradle of the Wahhabi faith, Najd? This

¹ For the terms of this Agreement, see the 1925 *Survey*, Vol. I of the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

I B N S A ' U D

land, as has been noted, King Ibn Sa'ud had not seen for two years. His absence was a source of less worry to himself than to the Najdis themselves, however, for the reason that the more he sought to conciliate the Muslim world in his treatment of the Hijaz, the more suspect did he tend to become in the eyes of the primitive men of Eastern Arabia. This suspicion took a dual form.

In the first place, the Wahhabis were afraid of criticizing no man, not even their ruler, Ibn Sa'ud, not even the Prophet Muhammad himself. Their *ulama* knew the fascination exercised by Mecca over the Prophet, after his battles had been fought by Medina, and they thought it not impossible that their Sultan might have succumbed to the lure of the more civilized, if, in a measure, despised, country of the Hijaz. In the second place, they would certainly not tolerate in this second Wahhabi Empire — an Empire built, in their opinion, upon the zeal of their *ulama* and the courage of their fighting men — any superiority of Mecca over Riyadh. What, they asked themselves, did this importation of foreign Arab brains into the administration of the Hijaz portend? And why this remittal of the *Ikhwan* from the conquered Holy Land to Najd? Was their great leader becoming imbued with 'infidel' notions?

Nor did these reactionary, though natural, sentiments stop at suspicion. In the autumn of 1926 two tribes, the Mutair and the Ataiba, had joined in making

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

certain demands of Ibn Sa'ud. These demands were reported to include permission to wage the *Jihad* (Holy War) against all non-Wahhabis, and the abolition of such Western innovations as telephones and telegraphs, hospitals, motor cars, and so forth.

Thus was a kind of Najdi 'nationalism' being pitted against the more enlightened regime which Ibn Sa'ud was seeking to introduce. It was a situation which needed circumspect though direct handling. And if the Wahhabi leader was discreet, he was also firm.

When, therefore, the negotiations with the British Consul broke down at the end of 1926, the Wahhabi King posted back to Riyadh to nip the incipient trouble in the bud. Once he was back in the Najdi capital, his old hold immediately reasserted itself. A vast gathering of tribal and religious leaders was summoned in January, 1927, at which he was begged, as an offset to or complement of his kingship of the Hijaz, to become King of Najd and its Dependencies. Naturally he accepted.

And so he became lord of the only Dual Monarchy then existing in the world — the Hijaz-Najd.

But the assumption of this new title did not assuage all the Najdis' anxieties. How should he treat the demands of the *Ikhwan* of the Mutair and Ataiba? The only course was to refer them to learned religious opinion, which surely would be binding on the fanatical tribesmen. Ibn Sa'ud therefore ordered the *ulama*

to pronounce upon the problems of the Holy War and of Western innovations. They in the following month declared that the decision upon the Holy War lay solely with the King as *Imam*, and that they had not sufficient knowledge of the telegraph and such matters to be able to give judgment upon them. To various other questions affecting the Hijaz they replied in keeping with their severely Puritanical outlook.

Their answers were from the monarch's point of view quite admirable, for they meant, on the one hand, that he could restrain his wilder men from excesses on non-Wahhabis and from complications with neighbouring States, and, on the other, that he could continue to introduce scientific appliances for the better administration of his huge kingdom. Yet, as will be seen in a later chapter, dealing with the rebellion of Faisal al Duwish, the diplomatic though honest replies of the *ulama* did not finally satisfy all the *Ikhwan*.

For the time being, however, the situation in Najd was calmed, and Ibn Sa'ud could safely return to the Hijaz for the joint purpose of resuming the negotiations with the British and of attending to the arrangements for the 1927 *Haj*.

First came the treaty negotiations. Luckily for the Wahhabi King, the British Government, on receipt of Ibn Sa'ud's attitude as conveyed to it by the British Consul at Jidda, had despatched to the Hijaz none other than the man with whom he had made so cordial a friendship at Bahra in 1925 — Sir Gilbert Clayton.

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

This time the negotiations went as smoothly as possible, and what is known as the Treaty of Jidda was signed on May 20th.

In this Treaty,¹ which was to last seven years, the British made no bones about recognizing the fact that since the 1915 Treaty with Ibn Sa‘ud his circumstances had utterly changed; nor, inferentially, did they gainsay the patent truth that they had changed for the better, both from the point of view of Arabia and of the British Empire, with its extensive interests in the Peninsula and in Islam generally. The pact was made with no trace of niggardliness, but as between equals and friends. First, Great Britain recognized the political and territorial increase of the Wahhabis since 1915. Next, the contracting parties undertook to disallow raiding tribesmen between the Wahhabis and the mandated territories of Iraq and Transjordan. Thirdly, equal protection and privilege were to be guaranteed to the British Muslims on pilgrimage as to other Mussulmans. Fourthly, the Hijaz or Najd nationality of Ibn Saud’s subjects when in territory under British control was recognized; and *vice versa*. Fifthly, Ibn Sa‘ud undertook to maintain friendly relations with Kuwait and Bahrain, and with the Shaikhs of Qatar and of the Oman coast. And lastly, Ibn Sa‘ud undertook to co-operate in suppressing the slave traffic in his domains.

¹ Ratifications were exchanged on September 17th, 1927. The text of this Treaty is contained in the British Parliamentary Paper, Cmd. 2951.

Almost equally important, at any rate in regard to the immediate future, as the Articles on the Treaty were the four pairs of Notes exchanged between Sir Gilbert Clayton and King Abdul Aziz between May 19th and 21st, for they concerned the particular, as opposed to the general, position of the Hijaz-Najd.

In the first pair of Notes, the British thesis was maintained that Aqaba and Maan belonged, not to the Hijaz, but to Transjordan. To this the Wahhabi King would not agree, but he did consent to maintain the *status quo*, pending a final settlement of the question.

In the second, the King agreed to the British intention to abstain at present from renouncing the right of manumitting slaves — British Consular Officers having long practised this.

In the third, it was recorded that the British embargo on the export of war materials to Arabia had been removed.

The fourth pair of Notes related to British Muslim pilgrims who died while in the Hijaz-Najd.

Nothing, then, could have been more auspicious for the Wahhabis than this first half of 1927: Ibn Sa'ud had calmed the Najd and had achieved a most satisfactory treaty with the British Empire. But the half-year was to contain yet another resounding triumph for the Wahhabi leader, namely the success of the Pilgrimage. It is claimed that a 'record' number of

ON THE CREST OF CONQUEST

persons were present at Arafat for the culminating ceremonies, despite the propaganda carried on to the effect that war between the Yaman and the Hijaz was imminent, and despite the refusal of the Egyptian Government to send the *Mahmal*. What King Abdul Aziz has done to stimulate the *Haj*, by means of improved communications, the establishment of law and order, better hygienic conditions, and so on, will be appraised in a later chapter, but if ever he had wished to find time for self-satisfaction, he might have chosen as such this June of 1927, when the densely-attended *Haj* was over, and when the grateful pilgrims were about to take away glowing accounts of his rule to the farthest ends of the world of Islam.

But he was not, and has never been, prone to self-satisfaction. And before the end of this very year of 1927, which had begun so propitiously, his wisdom in refraining from pride in achievement was to be startlingly justified.

A FRONTIER AFLAME

Difficulties with Iraq — Desert Police Posts. The Lawless 'Ikhwan' — A Crisis — 1927–1928

IN the autumn of 1927 began what was incomparably the most difficult period in the whole career of King Abdul Aziz. Over all political enemies, or chieftains of hostile neighbouring States such as Hail or the Hijaz, he had proved his superiority. In the world of Islam generally he could hold his own. With foreign countries his relations were on a footing of increasing friendliness and respect. But now he was faced with nothing less than the hostility of men who professed to base that hostility, not on jealousy or dynastic ambition, but simply and solely upon the purest form of Wahhabism. It was a desert movement, and as such, the truth of it was for long uncommonly difficult to discover. Embroiling both Iraq and Great Britain, it aroused such passions in Arabia as had been unknown since the Great War, and it took two years to conquer. It was, in my opinion, the crux of Ibn Sa'ud's life.

Had it succeeded, the Sa'udi House might well be to-day but a memory.

A FRONTIER AFLAME

The trouble arose in this way. Although for nearly two years the Government of Najd had carried out faithfully its pledge in regard to raiding contained in the 1925 Treaty of Bahra, the authorities in Iraq for their part were not satisfied with the control of their own tribes, and notably the Shammar, who not even yet had desisted from their hostile attitude towards the Wahhabi Power that had dislodged them from the Hail State in 1921. To achieve a stricter supervision of these potential, if not actual, violators of the Treaty with Ibn Sa'ud, the Iraqi — or, rather, the British mandatory — authorities conceived the idea of building in the desert on their side of the Iraq-Najd frontier a few police posts, equipped with wireless, by means of which the Iraq Camel Corps and the Royal Air Force could nip in the bud any aggressive movement of Iraqi tribes on Najd. Two places, Busaiya and Abu Ghar, distant respectively seventy-five miles and ninety miles from the nearest point of the Najd frontier, were first selected for the erection of such posts, and it was decided to construct them in the autumn of 1927.

Now certain of the *Ikhwan*, as was mentioned in the last chapter, were feeling strongly the urge to attack the non-Wahhabi Muslims, and the establishment of these posts seemed to them to provide an unassailable pretext for such an attack. In the Protocol of Uqair¹ of 1922 Iraq and Najd had agreed not to fortify watering-places in the vicinity of the frontier. What, then, were

¹ See p. 149 ante.

the Iraqi authorities doing at Busaiya? The Government of Riyadh, fearing apparently some vast imperialist scheme for controlling the desert by scientific means, was alarmed. Now were the fears being justified which Ibn Sa'ud had felt in allowing international conventions to interfere with the desert custom of travelling wherever pasture and water dictated. That was the view of Riyadh.

It was a tenable view, though legally false. Desert conceptions favoured it. The Badawin understood and defended it. But, whether or not the original setting of Iraq's frontier far out into the desert was a mistake, it could not now be expected that the Iraqi authorities would agree to the thesis that posts at a distance of over seventy miles from the frontier could be called 'within the vicinity of' that frontier. Their highest advisers supported the natural claims of prestige. They refused to remove the posts.

Here was a position made for the *Ikhwan*, who already were fatigued with Ibn Sa'ud's tendency to substitute diplomacy for force in his dealings with neighbours. For such an occasion they had been itching through long months. Little enough, in all probability, did they know of Treaty arrangements. All they saw was that an immemorial custom of the desert of free access to watering-places was being transformed or qualified, and, too, by those 'infidels' of Iraq.

They would not wait on Riyadh. They resolved to act.

A FRONTIER AFLAME

On November 5th, 1927, without warning and in the darkness, a hundred *Ikhwan*, under the terrible Faisal al Duwish of the Mutair, swept up to Busaiya. With fierce objurgations they hurled themselves on the small garrison. The mud-and-brick building, not then finished, contained only a handful of Nasiriya camel police and a few labourers. In a trice all the occupants were dead — six policemen, one overseer of the Public Works Department, twelve Arab labourers, and one woman. Their mutilated bodies were found by the Royal Air Force, flying to the scene of the outrage. The post was in ruins.

Again Iraq rang with indignation against the Wahhabis. Again the dreaded cry, ‘The *Ikhwan* are coming!’ sent the tribes of Iraq’s frontier scuttling back into the interior. The Iraqis were quite exasperated at the calmness of the British in face of these affronts. But the *Ikhwan* took no heed. In less than a month afterwards some more Mutairis raided into Kuwait near Jahra: there was no alleged violation of any Treaty to plead in justification of that. And on December 9th these same Mutair raided the Ghalidh section of the Bani Hachaim, a peaceful and defenceless shepherd tribe of Iraq.

Even worse was to follow. On December 17th, Faisal al Duwish attacked some Iraqi shepherds near Jumaima. This time not even babies were spared. Every male was sent to perdition.

The truth was that Faisal al Duwish and a medley

of tribesmen were out of hand. They cared no more for the anxieties of Ibn Sa'ud than for the protests of the Iraq Government. They were, in short, a law unto themselves.

In Iraq the savage memories of the nineteenth-century Wahhabis in Karbala and other places came surging back. This, however, is not the place to follow repercussions which these events caused in Baghdad. Suffice it to say that the demand for protection of Iraqi tribes and for retribution against the terrifying *Ikhwan* was insistent. Certain Baghdadis talked of leading armies into the desert against the Wahhabis; the air was full of martial ardour.

A large punitive expedition was prepared, with an advanced base at Ur of the Chaldees. Iraqi forces were to combine with the British. But in the event matters were left mainly to the Royal Air Force. It was decided to allow aeroplanes to chase the Najdi tribes into Najd if necessary, and to reconnoitre over the border to see whether the *Ikhwan* were concentrating in preparation for a raid.

Now it was the turn of Ibn Sa'ud's Government to protest. The Wahhabi leader could not well confess that, owing to the great distances separating his Administration from the seat of the trouble, he could not control his outlying tribes. Indignation in Najd at the action of the Royal Air Force in transgressing the frontier was intense, and it was a matter of touch-and-go whether popular opinion would swing wholly

A FRONTIER AFLAME

over to the side of the *Ikhwan* who had openly dispensed with or set at defiance the authority of King Abdul Aziz.

Meanwhile the raiding went on. And be it remembered that the raiding of the *Ikhwan* was not the ordinary raiding of the desert, which all Badawin recognized and, in their calmer moments, condoned. For the *Ikhwan* killed women and babies. They were regarded by ordinary raiders as monsters.

At the end of January, 1928, Mutairis raided into Kuwait, but were caught by aeroplanes as they returned with their booty. On February 19th a mixed Najd force raided an encampment of mixed Iraqi and Kuwaiti tribes at Jarishan, about forty-five miles south-west of Basra. In this raid Iraqi losses alone were twenty-eight men killed, 5,795 sheep, 699 donkeys, 29 rifles, and 46 tents looted. But again the raiders were punished from the air, and on February 24th aeroplanes went to bomb so far into Najd as As Safa, 130 miles south of the neutral zone.

The frontier was now aflame. On the one side were the Iraqis, powerless to prevent raids but swift and terrible in punishing them; on the other, the *Ikhwan* resolved not to cease raiding and clamouring for vengeance on the unfair weapon of the skies. No such situation had been formed in Arabia since the War. The whole Middle East looked on with apprehension. Rumours sped out that a Holy War was being declared by the Najdis, that King Abdul Aziz would himself

lead out his *Ikhwan* against Iraq, Transjordan, and Kuwait. The wires to great newspapers buzzed with excitement.

Fortunately, this rumour was but a bazaar report, circulated on the strength of desert gossip. The sources of public intelligence in the Middle East have never been very reliable; they failed utterly in this crisis, journalists from Basra and Jerusalem being the worst offenders. It is true that those *Ikhwan* who thought Ibn Sa'ud far too conciliatory wanted a *Jihad*, and a grand tribal advance on the Iraq frontier was threatened or mooted. It was stopped, however, by Ibn Sa'ud himself — and by the fact that the recognized raiding season was coming to an end. The Wahhabi ruler knew the folly of tribesmen hurling themselves against a land defended by the air arm, nor could he, in accordance with all his principles, finally refuse the suggestion, several times proffered by the British, of sending a special envoy to discuss personally with him the causes of friction between Iraq and Najd. He wanted a truce, not only to remove misunderstandings, but also to regain control of his provocative tribesmen. On April 4th he consented to discuss the matter with an Englishman who was already among his friends.

It was agreed that Sir Gilbert Clayton should go, with representatives of Iraq and Transjordan, to Jidda in May to meet Ibn Sa'ud. The situation for the Wahhabis was critical. Should an understanding not be arrived at, difficulties in Najd must inevitably

A FRONTIER AFLAME

increase, if, indeed, they were not to become almost insuperable.

But the question of the police posts proved knotty. The Pilgrimage was at hand, and Sir Gilbert Clayton had to leave Jidda before the end of May with the position still unsolved. The Wahhabi King was adamant on the problem of the desert posts, and would not admit that their erection was not an infringement of the Protocol of Uqair. In vain the British representative suggested that twenty-five miles was a distance reasonably to be called 'within the vicinity of' the frontier — and Busaiya and Abu Ghar were both more than seventy miles away from Najd.

Yet Sir Gilbert Clayton and King Ibn Sa‘ud had parted in May as friends, and they met again as friends at Jidda on August 1st. No better fate, however, attended this second meeting. The differences in the respective points of view were irreconcilable. Within a week negotiations had irrevocably broken down. Sir Gilbert left sadly for England, and King Abdul Aziz no less sadly for Mecca, Taif, and Riyadh.

What should the Wahhabi leader do now? His method of dilpomacy had failed, and those *Ikhwan* who had already fretted at his patient ways would be more than ever critical. That they should be allowed, when the winter raiding season began, to embroil Najd with Iraq in a real war was impossible: such a course led inevitably to the defeat of Najd. But certainly the *Ikhwan* were longing for revenge and loot. Now, if

ever, therefore, he must assert his authority as king of his people.

In the historic way of Najd, in such a fashion as belonged to the Middle Ages, he endeavoured to solve the vital problem. The autocrat would consult his democratic subjects direct. He motored back to Riyadh from the Hijaz and at once began to explore the real feelings of the land. There was opposition to him, and he knew it.

He convoked, on November 5th, 1928, a great national conference at Riyadh. All sections of the community were to be represented — all the *ulama*, all the tribes, all the *hijras* of *Ikhwan*. Yet not quite all actually assisted, and the abstentions were significant. Faisal al Duwish of the Mutair was not there, nor Sultan ibn Bijad of the Ataiba, nor Dhaidan ibn Hithlain of the Ajman. Great names these, in the history of the Wahhabi Empire: why were their bearers not present at Riyadh?

There could be but one answer: defiance. It would be now a fight to the death between King Abdul Aziz and some of the very men who had most conspicuously helped him into his present position of power. Was it to be over again the history of the Praetorian Guards of Rome, of the Janissaries of Turkey, of the Mamluks of Egypt? One thing at any rate was certain: there would be civil war in Najd.

THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR

The Riyadh Conference — A Policy of Peace — Ibn Sa‘ud's Supreme Test — Collapse of the Rebels — 1928–1929

THE national conference at Riyadh was a masterpiece of showmanship, a superb exhibition of statesmanship. More than that, it was a revelation of King Abdul Aziz at his sincerest and boldest. He faced the peril that comes soon or late to every Arabian dynasty: the peril of popular discontent. And if he faced it like a King, he faced it also like a man, a brother of the Bedawin. He was the autocrat and the democrat in one.

For day after day the debates went on. Every one had his say. Nothing was left undiscussed. No criticism of the Wahhabi monarch's policy was left unanswered.

The King began on a high note:

‘It is not (he said) out of fear of any of you that I have asked you to assemble here to-day, for I have built up this kingdom single-handed, God the Almighty being my sole support; God has sent me victorious; but, indeed, it is out of fear of God that

I have caused you to hold this conference. I have done so in order that I should not fall into self-conceit and undue pride.'

Before such a man, at once heroic and God-fearing, the passive Najdi hearts were fain to melt. The King had unerringly struck the right note. Boldness and confidence in his own strong hand, and humility in the sight of God: these were the themes on which he continued his speech. Finally, with a burst of insight into the feelings of his hearers, he declared:

'I want you also to consider whether I am fit for ruling you; if I am unfit for rule, elect one of the members of my family, who are present in this Assembly, and I will enthrone him and will give him proper support.'

Back came the unanimous answer:

'Oh, no! our lord! We have no desire for any King to rule over us except you, Oh Abdul Aziz!'

Thus was the offer of resignation followed, as the King had anticipated it would be followed, by acclamation and shouts of approval of his kingship. His position was beyond cavil confirmed.

He could now move confidently in the conference from one disputed point to another. Almost all his reforms, actual or projected, were subjected to debate — it is the right of the free Arab publicly to criticize

THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR

his King—but Ibn Sa‘ud came through the fires of argument unscathed, with heightened prestige, indeed.

One of the things upon which he set great store was the installation of wireless telegraphy. He had seen the practical impossibility of controlling his outlying tribes when he had no quick communication with them, and, seeing that their impetuous actions might result in fatal complications with Najd's neighbours, he bethought him of wireless.

But was wireless communication lawful? Was it not sorcery, black magic, the handiwork of Shaitan (the Devil)? The reactionaries of Najd said, Yes; the King and his closest friends said, No. Ibn Sa‘ud would not give way. He was prepared, he said, to order his whole life upon the Muslim Holy Law, but there was nothing in the Islamic religion to gainsay improvements in communications and the introduction of scientific progress. Yet he would put the question to the final authority in Najd on such matters—the *ulama*. Was there, he asked these learned men, anything laid down by the Prophet that could be interpreted as a prohibition of such improvements? And the *ulama*, who had already given the problem much consideration, answered in the negative.

Having gained this vital point, which foreshadowed stricter administration of the tribes, King Abdul Aziz outlined before the conference his policy of peace with his neighbours. He knew the difficulties of the tribes

I B N S A ' U D

and the provocations that had suffered. He knew the economic stress through which they had recently passed and were still passing; he understood how that, perhaps as much as anything, had driven them to the traditional pastime of raiding. In years of drought, indeed, and when no help is forthcoming from the land or the rulers of the land, the raid will always be considered by the Badawin as a means of subsistence. But economic suffering could not in the eyes of Ibn Sa'ud be held to justify the political embroiling of his kingdom with the mandated territories to the north. Peace, then, must be his object, and, if necessary, compensation afterwards to the needy tribes.

Outwards to the tribes of Najd was borne the message: 'It is to be peace.' But the Mutair and the Ajman and the Ataiba hearkened not. 'Peace?' they said, 'peace and friendship with the *mushraqin* of Iraq and Kuwait and Transjordan? Never! If those fallen ones in Riyadh will not take up the *Jihad* on these ungodly territories, we, we the *Ikhwan*, ourselves will wage it!'

So they defied their King. Those especially recalcitrant were Faisal al Duwish of the Mutair and Ibn Humaid of the Ataiba, chiefs of two of the earliest and most powerful *Hijras* in the whole of Najd — Artawiya and Ghatghat. They attempted, not without some success, to stir up the *Ikhwan* of other settlements against the authority of Riyadh. Rebellion was declared.

THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR

It was civil war: the supreme test of Ibn Sa'ud's career.

But the King, mindful of the past services of these men in the cause of Wahhabism, had little desire to exterminate them. He tried to negotiate for their peaceful surrender, being resolute in his intention to have them tried before the religious Courts of the country. His generous efforts were scorned; the desert pronounced for war. Ibn Sa'ud, perceiving that a resort to arms was unavoidable, prepared his campaign with care: he could not afford the slightest hitch in a matter of such importance to his authority. By the spring of 1929 he was ready to strike.

Towards the end of March, various detachments of the royal armies closed in from different directions on the entrenched base of the rebels between Artawiya and Zilfi. On the plain of Sibilla came the clash. It could end in one way only. The rebels, though fighting desperately, were so outnumbered that the combat swiftly ceased. Among the hundred of reported killed was Bandar, son of Faisal al Duwish, and the old, unappeasable warrior himself was sore stricken — by those who carried him off the field, indeed, he was thought to be mortally wounded. Ibn Bijad fled, but was captured and taken prisoner to Riyadh, where now he is with the not inconsiderable number of chieftains captured in Ibn Sa'ud's many fights.

The plight of Faisal al Duwish moved the great King to pity. Hero of a score of Wahhabi battles, he

was allowed to go scot-free, though, as all thought at the time, only to die. It was an affecting pardon. Faisal al Duwish was a fanatic who could never see that his country was greater than his tribe, but he was an old-fashioned warrior, he was (it was believed) painfully dying, his son (it was bruted) had been slain. Magnanimously and characteristically the King permitted him to pass his ebbing days in the free deserts of his birth.

Leaving to one of his brothers the task of punishing and razing to the ground the settlement of Ghatghat, which, with Artawiya, had been responsible for most of the trouble, King Abdul Aziz journeyed to the Hijaz, where the Pilgrimage season was approaching. He had not long been there when he heard that the rebellion which he thought he had crushed had broken out again.

The redoubtable Faisal al Duwish had not died (nor had his son Bandar), nor did he regard the King's mercy towards him as aught but weakness. If the previous revolt had been on too small a scale, that could easily be remedied. Ibn Humaid might be in prison in Riyadh, but another leader, Farhan ibn Mashhur, of the Ruwala, was ready to take his place. More important than that, the Ajman of the Hasa, a large tribe with a record of treachery and intractability, were eager to throw in their lot with Faisal al Duwish.

Both Faisal's Mutair and the Ajman under Dhaidan

THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR

ibn Hithlain exulted in raiding. They had, indeed, raided Kuwait and Iraq many times earlier in 1929, and the trail of their butchery, including small boys, yet once more had whipped the Iraqis to passionate denunciation. The desert was theirs, they asserted: they would raid again and again.

These intentions became known to Ibn Sa‘ud’s Governor in the Hasa, Abdullah ibn Jiluwi, whose admirable loyalty to the Wahhabi King has been remarked earlier in this book. He was determined, as every Najdi authority was determined, to obey the King’s orders and allow no more raids on Iraq — more especially since Ibn Sa‘ud’s personal friend, Sir Gilbert Clayton, had taken up the post of High Commissioner at Baghdad in 1929.

But just as the King’s prestige had failed to carry conviction to the Mutair, so the prestige of the stern Abdullah ibn Jiluwi in the Hasa failed to convince the Ajman — that section of them, at any rate, who were under Dhaidan ibn Hithlain and had allied themselves to the rebel *Ikhwan*. A secondary civil war, therefore, now broke out in this eastern province. The Governor collected a large force consisting partly of Hasa townsmen, and partly of tribesmen from the Bani Khalid, the Murra, the Bani Hajir, and the loyal Ajman, and placed it under the command of his son, Fahad ibn Jiluwi.

At Sarrar, the home of Dhaidan ibn Hithlain, the armies confronted one another. But before resort was

made to rifle and steel, a final effort at negotiation was essayed. Dhaidan, with a few horsemen, consequently rode over to the tent of Fahad, where he dismounted.

Now followed one of those scenes which, so to speak, make the history of Arabian warfare. A report reached Dhaidan's followers that Fahad was contemplating treachery towards their leader. Wild with anger and excitement, they advanced at night towards the loyal forces. In the difficult situation thus created, Fahad apparently had Dhaidan killed. This was too much for the Ajman, whether 'rebel' or 'loyal'. All their tribal instincts, deeper far than the later idea of obedience to a Government, were awakened. One of Fahad's servants was a man of the Ajman. He promptly turned on his master and slew him.

The 'loyal' Ajman thereupon joined the 'rebel' Ajman. The 'loyal' Badawin fled. Now were left only the Hasa townsmen and the united Ajman. All through the night a merciless fight raged on between them, until at dawn the townsmen, discomfited and dismayed, retreated. The field was left to the Ajman.

Thus was unrest spread once again over the face of the eastern deserts, and such was the position which King Abdul Aziz found when, in July, he hastened back, in his fleet of motor cars, from the Hijaz to Najd.

Naif ibn Hithlain had succeeded the murdered Dhaidan, and he was raiding and pillaging almost at will. It was, in a word, anarchy. On this occasion Ibn

THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR

Sa‘ud wasted no time in parleying with the rebels. He dispatched his eldest son and the Heir-apparent — the Amir Sa‘ud — in charge of a punitive expedition against the Ajman and also to act, during the illness which had overtaken the faithful Abdullah ibn Jiluwi as a consequence of the death of his son, Fahad, as Governor of the province of Hasa.

In the meantime, the King was arranging for flying columns to harass the rebels. He decided upon a complete disarming of the lawless *Ikhwan*. But before he could prepare a general offensive against them, the loyal troops of the Hasa — mainly the Awazim tribe — had, on October 5th, defeated a combined force of Ajman and Mutair. Yet another son of Faisal al Duwish was killed in this battle.

This unexpected victory was the beginning of the end. Frantically the ferocious Faisal tried to whip up the rebel movement, but the loyal forces were closing inexorably in on him. Iraq was hostile, Kuwait was hostile, Najd was hostile: these three countries had by now, moreover, arrangements with each other to confine the rebels to their ‘homeland’ by closing the frontiers.

On November 20th, the general Wahhabi advance began, King Abdul Aziz himself being in command. In his various contingents he, for reasons of policy, had included all sections of the Najd population. Thus there were levies of the Harb, the Ataiba, the Qahtan, the Dhafir, the Shammar, the Anaiza, and so on. By

means of an encircling movement, all should share in the honour of restoring their King's authority.

No terms for the rebels were available but those of unconditional surrender. Mile by mile they were driven into a corner at the angle of the Kuwait and Iraq frontiers, south-east of the 'neutral zone'. There could be no escape. But would Faisal al Duwish, scarred at once with honourable wounds and the record of treachery, now surrender to his King? Not he. On December 29th, he and his Mutair met the royal forces at Riqai, in the Batin valley. Beaten there, Faisal was now but a common fugitive. Whither should he turn?

At the change of the year the rebels surrendered, though not to the Wahhabis. The leaders, Faisal al Duwish, and Ibn Lami of the Mutair, Naif ibn Hithlain of the Ajman, and Farhan ibn Mashhur of the Ruwala, with the thousands of their followers crossed the borders of Kuwait and Iraq, there to surrender to the Iraqi and British authorities. And after a guarantee that they would receive humane treatment had been given by Ibn Sa'ud, they were, with the exception of Ibn Mashhur (who was a subject of Syria) handed over to their liege-lord.

So ended the civil war in Najd. The career of Faisal al Duwish, the stormy petrel of the Arabian desert, was over; the main cause of friction between Iraq and Najd was also removed. Thanks in great measure to the insistence of the British that the peace of the

THE WAHHABIS' CIVIL WAR

Peninsula largely depended upon the reassertion of the Wahhabi King's authority in his domain and to the help that they gave him, the Puritan King had triumphed over this, his last and most considerable obstacle.

Now the way led straight to a definitive understanding between Iraq and Najd, and it was to this consummation that King Abdul Aziz next addressed himself.

THE MEETING OF THE KINGS

King Ibn Sa'ud and King Faisal — Treaty with Iraq — Friction with Transjordan — 1930—1931

THE complete collapse of the rebels and their flight into Kuwait and Iraq did not signify, however, an immediate accession of cordiality between Najd and its northern neighbours. King Ibn Sa'ud promptly demanded the surrender by Kuwait and Iraq of the rebels. Arab traditions required that the Wahhabi King should first give adequate guarantees of their safety: the Governments of Kuwait and Iraq could not hand over these fugitives merely to have them executed in Najd. For a time tempers rose high over this point, but through the agency of the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Colonel H. V. Biscoe,¹ a way out of the difficulty was found.

The Wahhabi King agreed to discuss the matter with the Resident at Kuwait in January, 1930. The necessary guarantees were forthcoming, and the rebels were duly handed over.

¹ Later Sir Hugh Biscoe. He died on duty in the Gulf on July 19th, 1932, and was succeeded by Colonel T. C. W. Fowle.

THE MEETING OF THE KINGS

This crucial question having been settled, the path was now plain to the long-hoped-for meeting between King Faisal of Iraq and King Ibn Sa'ud. Never before — though Faisal had been King of Iraq since 1921 — had these two Arab monarchs seen each other face to face. It was to be an historic meeting.

As was only right, the affair was 'staged' by the British. For Great Britain had played no inconsiderable role in bringing about the humiliation of the Najd rebels. Not only had the Government of India, at the urgent request of the Wahhabi King in 1929, supplied arms and ammunition to Najd to the value of £31,500,¹ but the presence of the Royal Air Force by the frontiers of Najd also was of vital importance to the success of the operations. The Iraqi forces, moreover, based on those very desert posts (more had been built since the demolition of Busaiya in 1927), at the erection of which the Wahhabis had taken such umbrage, materially helped in compassing the downfall of the dissidents.

On a British warship, therefore, H.M.S. *Lupin*, and in the presence of the High Commissioner for Iraq, Sir Francis Humphrys,² the two Arab kings met on February 22nd, to seek out the peace of Arabia.

Each was at once attracted to the other. King Faisal, tall, thin, handsome, exerted his undeniable

¹ This has not yet been repaid. As revealed in the estimates published on March 29th, 1933, provision has been made for the British tax-payer to repay to the Government of India two-thirds of the amount stated.

² The successor of Sir Gilbert Clayton, who died suddenly in Baghdad on September 11th, 1929.

I B N S A ' U D

charm; he had banished soreness from his heart; he had come to make friends. King Abdul Aziz, even taller, bigger, and more benign, immediately responded to the courteous approach. The two monarchs soon discovered that they had underestimated and misunderstood each other, and that they were united by a common love — the love of Arabia.

In these circumstances, preliminary agreement was not difficult, though not all the questions outstanding between Najd and Iraq could be solved on the waters of the Persian Gulf. But the main outlines of the treaties of Friendship and Bon Voisinage that were to follow were made clear. Provision was made for mutual recognition of the independence of Iraq and of the Hijaz-Njad, for the exchange of diplomatic representatives, for the outlawing of tribal raiders, for the extradition of fugitives from justice, for the establishment of a Permanent Frontier Commission, for the settling by arbitration of disputes over interpretation of the treaties that were to ensue, for the favourable consideration by King Ibn Sa'ud of Iraqi claims for reparations arising from raids in recent years, and for the settling by an Arbitration Court of five members of the disputed police-posts in the Southern Desert — unless agreement were reached within six months.

The two royal Arabs were delighted beyond expectation with the conference. King Faisal was envisaging more vividly than ever the realization of one of his

THE MEETING OF THE KINGS

dreams — the unity of Arabia; King Ibn Sa'ud was unfeignedly happy that an end had come to the long strain of Iraqi-Najdi tension. Presents were exchanged and the kings parted with royal Arab farewells. Congratulations on the success of the meeting poured in from all sides.

Immediately afterwards, the Wahhabi King's Counsellor, Shaikh Hafidh Wahba, together with the Foreign Secretary of the Hijaz-Najd, journeyed to Baghdad to settle the details of the treaties. Agreement was reached and the treaties were initialled on March 10th. For signature, however, they would have to wait until the Iraq Government was rid of its domestic preoccupations, and, most notably, until it had made arrangements with the British for the termination of the mandatory regime in 1932.

There was thus a long interval between initialling and signing, during which the atmosphere became a little heated between Riyadh and Baghdad owing to the non-rendition to the Wahhabis of Farhan ibn Mashhur, of the Ruwala, who had sought refuge in Iraq at the end of 1929. This man had thrown himself on the mercy of King Faisal, who thus, owing to the tribal laws of hospitality, could not accede to the request of King Ibn Sa'ud that he be handed over to Najd. But the King of Iraq did give an undertaking to try to persuade Ibn Mashhur to travel to Riyadh. Ibn Mashhur was promised by the Wahhabi King safe conduct for his life. But the wily Syrian had

I B N S A ' U D

no desire to follow Faisal al Duwish to the dungeons of Riyadh. At last he consented to go to Ibn Sa'ud via Syria and Jidda. But the attractions of Syria proved too strong, and the Wahhabis were cheated of one whom they considered to be their lawful prey. For their disillusionment, the Iraq Government naturally received the most blame.

But there was no doubt that a real *rapprochement* had been effected between Iraq and Najd at the meeting of the Kings, and in April, 1931, the Prime Minister of Iraq, General Nuri Pasha al Said, journeyed to the Hijaz to meet King Ibn Sa'ud. On April 8th, in Mecca, two treaties were signed, the first one of Friendship, Bon Voisinage and Arbitration, the second one of Extradition, providing for the surrender by each country to the other of criminal refugees from justice.¹

Yet if King Ibn Sa'ud had established tranquil relations with King Faisal and with Iraq, he was far from having smoothed down the antagonism felt by and towards King Faisal's brother, the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan. Actually the quarrel between Transjordan and Najd took longer to resolve than any of the Wahhabi King's quarrels — unless, indeed, the dispute with the Egyptian Government over the *Mahmal* be put into that category.

Transjordan, however, did not attract the attention

¹ The text of these treaties is to be found in the annual Colonial Office Report on Iraq for 1931.

THE MEETING OF THE KINGS

given to its larger neighbour, Iraq, and the truth concerning it was hidden from the public. The Badawin of Transjordan have probably been as prone to raid in the past as any other Badawin in Arabia, but, since they belong to a small State (in the formation of which they naturally had little say) their grievances have tended to be overlooked.

It has been noted, earlier in this book, how the Wahhabis, after the fall of Hail in 1921, endeavoured to extend their influence in the direction of Transjordan, how raid after raid was sent thither, only to suffer punishment at the hands of the Royal Air Force, and how, by the Treaty of Hadda in 1925, an effort was made both by Najd and Transjordan to stop this raiding and counter-raiding.

It has also been noted how, in the autumn of 1927, a section of Najdi Badawin, centring round Faisal al Duwish, got out of hand and went raiding on its own account. Now among the freebooters of the desert was a Syrian subject who had but recently come to Najd. He has already been mentioned — Farhan ibn Mash-hur, of the Ruwala. He had with him a small band who lived for nothing but the *ghazzu*. In the spring of 1928 and 1929 he collected a larger band of lawless tribesmen and conducted raids on Transjordan, and on the Bani Sakhr and the Huwaitat he inflicted terrible losses. Naturally, the Transjordan tribes retaliated. The Huwaitat began to raid all round Jauf, the district which Ibn Sa'ud had striven so hard to obtain

and which was incorporated in Najd by the 1925 Treaty.

The Government of Transjordan, apparently, could at that time neither protect nor restrain the Huwaitat, whose emulation of Wahhabi ferocity was probably not unworthy. But now another complication arose. In March and April of 1929 Farhan ibn Mashhur and his rebels fought their way across Arabia in the direction of Kuwait, in which neighbourhood, as has been related, they found a man after their own heart, the swashbuckling Faisal al Duwish.

As a consequence of this movement, the retaliatory actions of the Huwaitat fell, not on the principal offenders — although some of the local Jauf tribes, such as the Shararat and the Ruwala, had joined in Ibn Mashhur's raids. It was the irony of events that the counter-raids of the Huwaitat coincided almost exactly with the desperate efforts of King Abdul Aziz against the rebels in Central and Eastern Arabia, from about the spring of 1929 to the end of that year; and the view was pardonably entertained in Riyadh that these raids were nothing but diversions in favour of the rebels.

Once more, therefore, misunderstanding arose between King Ibn Sa'ud and the Amir Abdullah. The temper of the Wahhabi monarch at raids on his domain had always been of fearsome quality, but his anger at the action of the Transjordan tribes knew no bounds. No sooner were the adherents of Faisal al Duwish settled with than two heavy raids of revenge

THE MEETING OF THE KINGS

were launched on the Huwaitat. One was conducted by Ibn Musa'ad, Governor of Hail. The losses of the Huwaitat were extreme.

In the meantime, however, Iraq, through the medium of the British, was making peace with Najd. British officials in Transjordan were consequently instructed to do all they could to conciliate the Wahhabi monarch on their side of the Peninsula. Accordingly the Amman Government, to the dismay of the Huwaitat, by means of the Royal Air Force prevented all raids on Najd. In an endeavour to arbitrate on the disputes between Transjordan and Najd, a conference was held, under the presidency of Mr. M. S. Macdonnell, of the Sudan Government, at Amman in the autumn of 1930.

Even while this conference was sitting the Huwaitat, whose condition was pitiable and could be remedied only by direct Government aid or by the *ghazzu* on Najd, contrived to slip the vigilant R.A.F. and to indulge, not in a raid, indeed, but in some thieving. At this, the Wahhabi's ire blazed. Permission was given to Najd tribes to counter-raid. Not unnaturally, the conference was embarrassed.

Suspicion between Transjordan and Najd had increased, and the Amman Government had become unpopular with the tribes of Transjordan. Obviously more effective measures were needed to prevent, or, rather, as a substitute for, the raid, for, as has been more than once pointed out in this book, if means

of subsistence fail or means of livelihood are removed, no tribe in Arabia will refrain from raiding.

The economic factor in the Peninsula is in the long run the winning factor, and if Governments forbid, as civilized Governments must forbid, their subjects to raid, they must provide for the tribes, who not seldom experience the borderline of starvation, the wherewithal to live.

Not until 1933 was there a real prospect of ending the troubles between Amman and Riyadh. Actually as this book is being published negotiations are hopefully in process for drawing up treaties of Friendship, Arbitration and Extradition.

But whether or not peace and treaty had ensued in 1930, one thing above all these tribal troubles had burned into the mind of King Abdul Aziz: the urgent necessity of swifter communications for the control of his vast kingdom. Already he had overcome the objections of the reactionaries of Najd to scientific inventions; he could now, therefore, have aeroplanes, more motor cars, and, especially, he could link up the centre and the fringes of the empire by means of wireless.

CHAPTER XXII

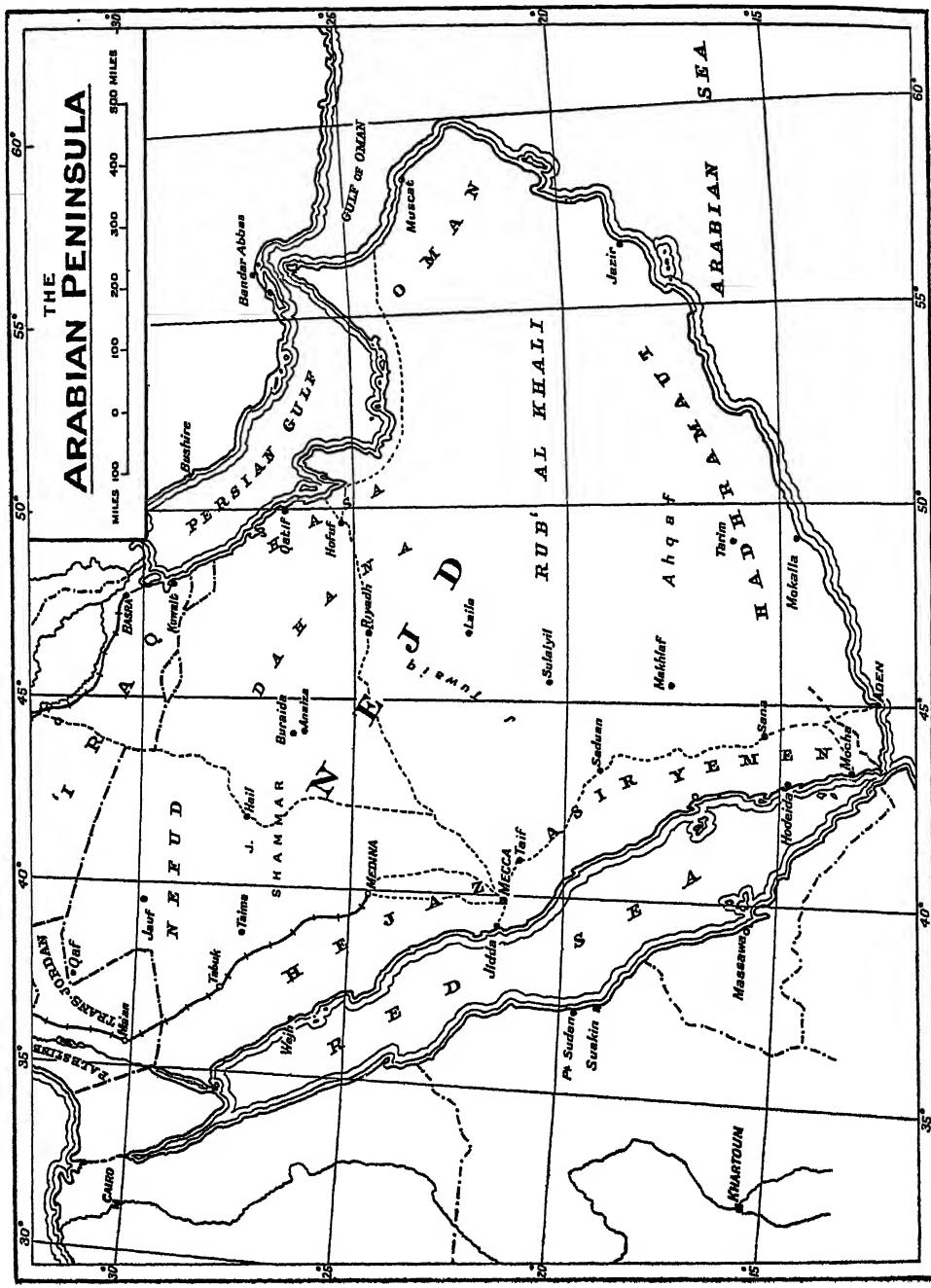
POWER AND POVERTY

Status of Foreign Representatives — Ibn Rifada's Rebellion — Asir Revolt — The Succession — 1930—1933

EVEN before King Abdul Aziz had shown his resolve to reform his administration by the introduction of scientific instruments, the Great Powers had manifested their recognition of his place in the Peninsula by altering the status of their diplomatic representatives in Jidda. France was the first to change her Consulate into a Legation, at the end of 1929. Great Britain did so shortly afterwards, Sir Andrew Ryan being appointed in February, 1930, to be the first British Minister Plenipotentiary to the Wahhabi State. Other States fell in line with the lead thus given.

Each non-Muslim Power represented at Jidda has, of course, a Muslim who can on occasions go into Mecca. It was suggested that those Muslim States which had accredited representatives in Sa'udi Arabia should have Legations in Mecca, but the Wahhabi King ruled that all should be on the same footing in Jidda.

It was ironical that Ibn Sa'ud's attainment of



POWER AND POVERTY

supreme powers should coincide almost exactly with the beginning of the world slump. To a country such as his, possessed of no natural resources, and especially to such countrymen as his, unendowed with the acquired habit, if an inapplicable metaphor may be permitted, of 'saving against a rainy day', the financial depression came with particular severity. The Hijazis were comparatively unversed in such factors as world markets and financial manipulation, and deep gloom succeeded timorous wondering.

Such was an ideal moment for enemies of the Wahhabî State to endeavour to foment discord among Ibn Sa'ud's hard-pressed subjects. In other times, the Arabian Peninsula would have rung with the cries of raiders, hungry for food and eager for adventure. Actually, however, there were but two quite small revolts, on the north and on the south of the Hijaz. The first was engineered in the summer of 1932 by an obscure shaikh, one Ibn Rifada of the Bili tribe. Probably he could neither read nor write, otherwise he might have been encouraged by the journalistic misrepresentations of Badawin discontent with Ibn Sa'ud. Arabia, unfortunately, is still good 'copy' for the sensational journalist. But Ibn Rifada had only four or five hundred men, and after desultory attempts to arouse disloyalty among Wahhabî subjects, he met the royal forces in July near Dibba, on the Red Sea. His motley band was annihilated, and he himself was beheaded.

A few months later, the Idrisi of Asir (whose State was by treaty with Ibn Sa'ud virtually a Wahhabi Protectorate) took it into his head to conduct a minor rebellion against the authority of King Abdul Aziz. A punitive expedition was dispatched under Ibn Musa'ad, Governor of Hail, whose treatment of rebels never erred on the side of leniency, and early in 1933 this revolt also was crushed.

There remains but one event to chronicle to bring this narrative of Ibn Sa'ud's career up to date. In the spring of 1933 it was decided that the time had come to appoint an heir to the Throne. There was never any doubt that the King would approve of his eldest surviving son, the Amir Sa'ud, as his successor. This young Prince, who for some years has been Viceroy of Najd, is a man after his father's heart, as he takes after his father physically. He thoroughly understands the Badawin, among whom he has fought many a battle; nor is he ignorant of Western opinion, despite the fact that he has been no farther out of Arabia than Egypt. But since Ibn Sa'ud himself has never been out of Arabia, that in itself is no depreciation.

The Amir Sa'ud was officially announced as heir to the Throne in May, 1933. -

SCIENCE IN THE DESERT

Aeroplanes and Wireless — Facilitating Administration — Motor Cars and Communications — Peace and Stringency — The Falling Pilgrimage — Concessions

LONG before the rebellion of 1929 King Abdul Aziz had appreciated the virtues of the motor car in his domains. Over the long flat stretches which separated the various towns of the Hijaz and Najd the immemorial camel could not compare (except in price of transport) with the automobile. Even prior to his conquest of the Hijaz Ibn Sa'ud had imported cars from the Persian Gulf and had travelled in them, and with the extension of his conquests to the Red Sea he imported many more. Made roads were scarcely necessary in the hard desert, though a metalled track was laid down between Jidda and Mecca.

Automobiles, however, were primarily for civilian purposes, and mainly for increased comfort. The 1929 rebellion forced Ibn Sa'ud to look for scientific ways of ensuring his rule and facilitating his administration. It opened his eyes fully to the manner in which, since the War, Western Powers had subdued hitherto

I B N S A ' U D

inviolate deserts: no Badawin, he perceived, could indefinitely withstand the penetration of armoured car, wireless, and aeroplane. He was well aware that the administration of such extensive parts of the Islamic world as were not governed independently by Muslims had been enormously facilitated by means of the internal combustion engine.

He, therefore, would follow the lead of the West. Towards the end of 1929, four aeroplanes purchased in Great Britain arrived in the Persian Gulf for Najd, though just too late to be used against the rebels. They were transferred to Jidda in the September of the following year.¹

In 1930 Ibn Sa'ud also placed with the Marconi Company of London an order to instal a chain of wireless stations in his Kingdom. This contract was actually completed in 1933. There are now two 6-kilowatt stations in the two capitals, Mecca² and Riyadh, and a half-kilowatt station in each of the Hijazi towns of Tabuk and Jidda, in the Central Arabian towns of Qaf, Hail, and Buraida, and in the Persian Gulf towns of Qatif, Jubail, and Uqair.

In addition to these fixed stations, the King has now at his disposal four lorries fitted with Marconi sets. By means of these he can, while on his long journeys across the desert, keep in close touch with events in the centre or in the furthest ends of his realm.

¹ Primarily for financial reasons, this small air-force has since disappeared.

² For the installation at Mecca, the Marconi Company borrowed the services of a Muslim engineer on the staff of the Egyptian State Railways.

SCIENCE IN THE DESERT

The introduction of this system of communication must revolutionize the administration of Arabia. The stations are reserved for Government use, nor are they for communication with the outside world. Their sole *raison d'être*, in short, is better and swifter administration of the State.

But if wireless were a Government monopoly, there was no restriction on the purchase of automobiles.¹ There is, it need scarcely be remarked, no tourist traffic in the Hijaz-Najd, but for the favours of the Pilgrims making their way to and from Mecca the various transport companies fought hard; in fact, at one time they cut one another's throats. This, however, was in the first flush of enthusiasm for a new vehicle — for any vehicle, indeed, other than the camel or the horse — and equilibrium in the matter of motor cars which the Wahhabi Empire can reasonably subtend is patently only a question of time, if it has not already been achieved. Very largely, of course, it depends upon the development of the Pilgrimage, and that no one at this moment can foresee.

Yet it is of little use to improve and 'speed up' transport if there is nothing to transport. Ibn Sa'ud has always recognized the necessity of extracting more from the barren earth of his domain. Its chief defect, of course, is lack of water. No rivers run across Arabia,

¹ An extreme instance of the way in which the motor car is supplanting the camel in Arabia is recorded by Mr. Philby in his *The Empty Quarter*, where he speaks of finding the tracks of a Ford car that in 1931 had made the journey from Abu Dhabi, on the Trucial Coast, to Mecca.

only *wadis* which when in spate carry all before them and which when the rains hold off are dry. Yet what water could be extracted from the soil and used for agriculture the Wahhabi monarch was resolved to have. To this end he began, about 1930, to import and to distribute among his *Ikhwan* colonists machinery for pumping water and for boring artesian wells. Good results have been obtained, but, unfortunately for the Wahhabis, they are limited: the struggle of the people with the meteorological and geological enemy is a dour one indeed.

It ought to be noted here that there has been no uncontrolled rush, despite the overruling of the Najdi obscurantists, to place such reliance on the discoveries of science as has prevailed in, and, as I think, disfigured the West. The cinematograph, for example, is allowed no entry into the Wahhabi dominions. There is, in short, no sort of substitution of science for Puritan faith.

It is a measure of Ibn Sa'ud's dominating personality that, despite the economic stringency which has afflicted his land, as all others, since 1930, there had been no kind of revolt against his administration, unless exception be made of the rebellion of Ibn Rifada in 1932, and that was engineered outside the Hijaz. The Pilgrimage, which during the years 1926-1929 had been extremely well attended, began to decline. It mattered not whether the would-be Pilgrims were cotton-growers in Egypt or rubber-growers in the

SCIENCE IN THE DESERT

Dutch East Indies or pearl-merchants in Bombay: the world-slump hit them all. They could not afford to make the journey to the Holy Land of Islam.

Matters in 1932 were growing very serious. There had been drought over the land, and to the importance of this factor in Arabian history attention has already been drawn. Trade was dead. Debts stood unpaid. Merchants were in despair. For the Badawin there was but stony pasture. Beggars demanded food in the name of Allah. Officials knew the futility of asking the Government for their pay. There was peace, indeed, but the gloom over the whole land was insipidated. In other times outlet might have been found in foreign diversion, in raids on neighbouring countries; but such a solution was impossible with Abdul Aziz as King.

At last the Sa'udi Government was driven to take such measures as would have been anathema to the older generation of Wahhabis. It is too early yet to say how these efforts to mitigate the economic crisis will modify the fundamental problem of the Hijaz and Najd. A concession was granted early in 1933 to a group of Indian Muslims for the construction of a railway from Jidda to Mecca; for this, a certain sum of money was advanced to the Mecca Government. About the same time a concession was signed for the establishment of a State Bank, for which the ex-Khedive of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi, stood as principal financial guarantor. Hopes are entertained, moreover,

I B N S A ' U D

of the discovery of oil in the Hasa and of mineral wealth in the Hijaz.¹

It should be repeated, however, that the economic prosperity of the Hijaz-Najd — Sa'udi Arabia, as it began to be called in 1932 — rests mainly on hope; it has yet no certain basis save that of the fluctuating Pilgrimage. Science can and will do wonders to facilitate administration, but it cannot create a water-supply or place riches in soil which has never known them.

¹ Investigation into the possible mineral resources of the Hijaz (it will be recalled that Sir Richard Burton sought in vain for gold in Midian) has been undertaken by an American geologist, Mr. K. S. Twitchell, whose interests in Arabia are connected with those of Mr. Charles Crane, the American millionaire who has done much travelling in Western Arabia since the War.

CHAPTER XXIV

ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER

Ibn Sa'ud's Character and Habits — His Reforms

WHAT manner of man is King Abdul Aziz? Physically he is of commanding stature. Six feet four inches in height, and both well-proportioned and muscular, he towers over the majority of his subjects. Not that there is such a thing in Arabia as physical domination; it is personality, of which the Wahhabi King is full, that counts.

He is not what Westerners imagine to be a 'typical Arab', that is, he is not markedly Semitic in physiognomy, though his complexion is such as most men possess who have lived all their lives in Central Arabia. His face, long and oval in shape, is handsome. In repose, there is in it a suggestion of melancholy, but when he is animated every emotion is depicted with lightning rapidity. One might say that frankness and benignity are his distinguishing features.

His personal habits, his dress and his food, are simple in the extreme. Not a jot cares he for the mere pomp and ceremonial of power. He makes no insistence on

the form of authority: the reality is all that matters. When, for example, the *ulama* of Najd and the Hijaz passed, in 1931, a resolution that the annual celebration of the anniversary of his accession to the Throne of Hijaz-Najd on January 8th, 1926, was an unnecessary innovation, a European rather than an Islamic or Arab custom, he at once saw the force of the point, and since the objection concerned, not his State, but himself alone, acquiesced in their resolution and abolished the festival. He answered the request of the religious luminaries with the following quotation from the Quran:

‘Oh, Lord, I have sinned against myself, and if thou forgivest me not and hast not mercy on me, I shall surely be among the losers.’

And he went on to say:

‘Whatever good I have done is surely due to God’s guidance, and whatever bad I have done is surely my own fault and Satan’s influence. I do not exculpate myself—one is perpetually being prompted to evil.’¹

It was said in the Introduction to this book that the ‘pure, unswerving Puritan faith’ of King Abdul Aziz had at once ‘spurred him on and yet kept him humble’. Surely this incident concerning his accession is striking

¹ This incident was related in an unpublished paper which Shaikh Hafidh Wahba read to the Near and Middle East Association in London on December 4th, 1931. In other ways in the present chapter I have made use of this valuable paper.

ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER

evidence of his humility. He is, indeed, a deeply pious and religious man, for whom self-pride is a sin. There is with Ibn Sa‘ud no question of formal participation in the spiritual practices of his subjects: he is utterly sincere.

This, according to Shaikh Hafidh Wahba, is a typical day with the Puritan King. Rising an hour before dawn, he reads the Quran, the corner-stone of his whole life, until from the *muadhdhin* comes the call to the dawn prayer. After doing his first duty of the day in the mosque, he goes back to his home to recite verses of the Quran and of the *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet). If there is any urgent State business it now receives attention, after which the King retires for a short time, rising later to bath, dress, and breakfast. After this he attends his Privy Council, where he deals with the more important State business.

Then follow the functions which in Western eyes really distinguish the democratic and intimate Arab from the autocratic or distant ruler. King Abdul Aziz receives the desert shaikhs and the chiefs of the Arabs in private interviews, listens to their grievances, and hears and gives advice. Afterwards, the General Council is held. At this, no one is forbidden. Everyone can approach the King direct: there is in Arabia no ‘divinity that doth hedge a King’. If the Badawin wish to address him, they look at him straight in the eyes and say, ‘Oh! Abdul Aziz!’

Lunch then follows, the noon prayer, more State

I B N S A ' U D

business at his Privy Council, the afternoon prayer, and then the entertaining of his relations and high officials. A short spell of recreation (often taking the form of motor drives into the desert) is now indulged in; then come dinner, another General Council, and finally, before the King retires to sleep, an hour or two's reading to him of the varied sacred literature of Islam.

This great 'Champion of the Reformed Islam' has his fits of depression, but his natural and most infectious cheerfulness keeps breaking in: he cannot be glum for long. He has not lost a boyish love of picnics and sports — in fact, for any sort of 'lark'. He likes nothing better than to organize impromptu competitions in riding or racing or shooting, and even retains his youthful outlook in preferring to win!

Ibn Sa'ud's generosity is boundless. Avarice is no unknown vice in Arabia; yet assuredly there will be no hoarded treasure at the death of Abdul Aziz to be passed on to his family. No man can ask him for food and go empty away. At Riyadh he keeps a great guest-house wherein the stranger may at any time obtain free food and shelter; nor in normal times are the provisions at Mecca any less munificent. His gifts are continual and handsome. This lavishness, it might be added, has necessarily been qualified by the recent stringency from which his land, like all the rest of the world, has suffered, but the capacity of the Arab for 'tightening his belt' is unsurpassed. And Ibn Sa'ud's generosity is congenital.

ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER

Arabia is a land of renowned speech, and Ibn Sa'ud's powers of oratory befit his position. He has indeed a wonderful command of language, whether in public or in private conversation. Nor is his talk but a flow of words. He likes analysing, dissecting subjects, approving heartily of the academic mode of dividing his thoughts into three (first, secondly, and thirdly and finally). Towards his subjects he knows the exact tone to adopt, whether to the Badawin or to the town-dwellers. And every foreign visitor to the land has found his general conversation charming.

The Wahhabi King is essentially human. Few things he loves better than, when the cares of the day are over, to gather together a company of worthy souls to hold spirited converse. He revels in conversation. Unlike some of his Najdi subjects, whose faith is untempered by wider horizons, he is not given to moroseness. Some of the *Ikhwan* are incorrigibly sour-faced. But the King, though sad, even melancholy at times, is never unsocial. Not for him is gloom to be equated with righteousness, as it was with some of the European Puritans, as it is, indeed, with some of the more rigid inhabitants of Riyadh to-day. Laughter and jokes are sweet in his ears; and he never tires of joyous tales.

To the married state he is fully given over.¹ He never has lacked his complement of wives. Amativeness is rare in Arabia only when opportunity lacks.

¹ He has about twenty children.

I B N S A ' U D

Characteristic of the Arab, too, are the incomparable bursts of temper in which Ibn Sa'ud sometimes indulges. A sudden storm, a fierce thunder-clap, a lightning indictment — and it is over.

Abdul Aziz has a very pretty wit. It is shown notably in terse, even laconic comment. When, for example, the late King Husain proclaimed himself 'King of *All* the Arabs', Ibn Sa'ud noted the assumption by declaring that he was unaware that a few Hijazi merchants had ever before been equated with the Arab people. Again, when Husain demanded his recognition of his taking the office of Caliph, Ibn Sa'ud replied that when the seventy-three sects of Islam¹ had afforded such recognition, it would be time for himself and his Wahhabis to fall in line with Islamic sentiments!

One of this King's most appealing traits is his love for his relatives, either living or dead. Often he has been seen to shed tears (a not unusual form of emotion among the Arabs) at the memory of those who have passed from him. And whenever he can he visits the cemetery on a Friday as a tribute to those of his family who have found rest in Allah's Heaven.

Is there a ruler in all the Orient to-day like Ibn Sa'ud? Comparisons are invidious. I shall mention no other all-powerful ruler, God-fearing or God-fearless, but certainly he has no parallel in the modern

¹ The Prophet Muhammad is said to have prophesied that his followers would break up into seventy-three sects. The actual number of sects in Islam to-day is considerably greater.

ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER

Islamic world. At once a successful soldier, an original reformer, profoundly religious, human, accessible, generous, frank, firm, intelligent, brave, yet humble — there is none like him. The subjects of no land converse with their leader more freely, respect him more utterly, would follow him more devotedly. His large, rugged personality, indeed, has fired the idealists of many an Islamic society outside his own State.

His defects, if defects they be, derive from environment and heredity, from the restrictions of religious outlook and from centuries of virtual ignorance. But their existence is an absolute, not a comparative conception. A less rigorous and more erudite man might well be out of place. He is a born leader of men, who indeed are not so much his subjects as his brothers.

And his reforms? These date from the very time when he felt his power securely established in Najd. His greatest reform, already mentioned in chapter vii, has been conducted towards the harnessing of the roving tribesmen to the soil, the conversion of the lawless nomad into the settled agriculturist. His motives in this original endeavour have been explained: they were, in effect, to prevent the disintegrating results of the raid, the *ghazzu*, and the creation of a sort of standing army.

Now it may at once be said that, since so large a part of this biography has been taken up with raids on or by Najd, Iraq or Transjordan, the policy of

settling the *Ikhwan* in various *Hijras* (or *Hijar*) has failed. Many observers, indeed, said at the beginning of the Wahhabi's rule that the policy was bound to fail: and this for two reasons. First, the water supply of Najd was and would ever remain insufficient for any considerable area of arable land to be established; and secondly, the essential character of the raiding and tribal Badawin could not be changed, that, in short, the *ghazzu* was an integral part of the Badawin's being. It is true that the movement to found *Hijras* has now ceased, presumably because there are no more suitable sites in Najd for such agricultural colonies; it is true also that the tribal spirit, more than once since 1912, the date of the inauguration of the first *Hijra* at Artawiya, has blazed fiercely among the *Ikhwan*. The rebellion which the Mutairi *Ikhwan* of Artawiya and the Ataiba *Ikhwan* of Ghatghat waged in 1929 against Ibn Sa'ud is a case in point.

But the cautious observer, intent only on the truth of the problem, surely will suspend judgment. So radical a reform cannot be expected to be fool-proof in a short period. General education must follow the agricultural and religious instruction given to the *Ikhwan*, as nobody realizes more fully than Ibn Sa'ud himself. In spite, therefore of the fact that the *Ikhwan* have occasionally failed to resist the old urge to raid (being moved thereto partly by economic stress), this movement of founding *Hijras* may still be accounted the most striking and the most far-reaching, poten-

ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER

tially if not actually, of all Ibn Sa‘ud’s reforms. There are now cantonments among the Mutair, the Ruqa section and the Barqa section of the Ataiba, the Harb, the Shammar, the Hutain, the Dawasir, the Ajman, the Qahtan, the Awazim, the Murra, the Hajar, and among certain tribes in Kharj. To-day there are about a hundred *Hijras*, giving to Ibn Sa‘ud a kind of standing army of about 60,000 men.

In the success and development of this *Hijra* movement — the conception of a reforming genius — may be held to lie the chief hope of the stability of Central Arabia.

Beside this, the Wahhabi’s other reforms may seem small or obvious. It has always to be remembered, however, that the material, human and territorial, upon which he was imposing these reforms was generally far from tractable, though his subjects now are more impressionable than the soil.

To education, the people of the Hijaz-Najd turned willingly. All Arabs, whether in the Peninsula, or in Palestine or Iraq, have an appetite for knowledge and are ready learners, and the main drawbacks to the further spread of education in Wahhabi Arabia have been lack of money and lack of suitable teachers. Religious education, of course, has long existed, but modern scientific education was a new notion in Najd. However, Ibn Sa‘ud, who is not, in the usually accepted sense of the word, himself a learned man, launched a programme of educational reform in

1926. He chose as his first Minister of Education, Shaikh Hafidh Wahba, now his Minister in London. Teachers from neighbouring Arabic-speaking countries such as Syria and Egypt were borrowed, and a certain number of Hijazis and Najdis were sent on educational missions abroad. Thus the opening-up of this ancient land to more 'advanced' ideas, though not uncontrolled, is certain gradually to be effected.

In the sphere of medicine, King Abdul Aziz has proved a pioneer in Najd, and an able seconder of the efforts previously made by the Turks in the Hijaz. Hitherto the Najdis had relied mainly on herbs for the cure of ailments. The fame of the American missions founded in such Gulf towns as Kuwait, Bahrain, and Basra, had spread into the interior; it was an American doctor, indeed, who first went across the desert to Riyadh from the Gulf in order to treat the cataract in the King's left eye. But for the introduction of such things as vaccination as a protection against small-pox, better sanitation, travelling hospitals, dispensaries and clinics, King Ibn Sa'ud deserves the major credit. And if he has done this for Najd, no less has he accomplished for the Hijaz. The health of the Pilgrims, in fact, has been one of his nearest cares. Improvements in pure water-supplies, in sanitation, in hospitals and the like in towns such as Mecca and Jidda, have had their gratifying reflection in the decrease in the number of deaths among the *hajjis*. It may be some time yet before the hygienic

ABDUL AZIZ THE MAN AND REFORMER

conditions of the Pilgrimage are such as to convince Western Governments of the desirability of abolishing the quarantine stations at Tor and Karaman, at the northern and southern ends of the Red Sea respectively, but there has unquestionably been a turn for the better since the Wahhabis have had control of the Pilgrimage.

The strict regulation of rates and dues which the *hajjis* have to pay for their sojourn in the Holy Land has proved a great boon. The pilgrim is no longer subject to a double fleecing — by the State and by the individual Hijazi.

Of Ibn Sa‘ud’s administration of justice many tales could be told. Based on the Muslim Holy Law, the *Shar‘*, it is swift and condign. To amiable sentimentalists, there may seem something barbarous in some of the dispensations allowed by the Quran — such, for instance, as the severance of the hand for theft (in England not much more than a century ago a man could be hanged for stealing a sheep) — but the fact is that a large section of Ibn Sa‘ud’s subjects are still in a very primitive condition, not far removed from animalism in some cases. The tribes dwelling in or near the famous southern desert called the *Rub‘ al Khali*,¹ for example, are little more than savages. Any kind of false mercy would be at once and disastrously misunderstood: the only alternative to anarchy is an

¹ "The Empty Quarter", as it is called, was crossed for the first time by a European by Mr. Bertram Thomas in 1931, and was deeply penetrated by Mr. St. John Philby in 1932.

I B N S A ' U D

iron rule. Personally Ibn Sa'ud is not disposed to harsh judgments; time and time again, and sometimes mistakenly, he has shown leniency. But the Holy Law must be obeyed.

The revolution which has been effected by the introduction of scientific means of communication has been mentioned in the last chapter. Here it remains to add only the base on which all Ibn Sa'ud's reforms have been laid down, itself the mightiest reform of all: I mean the establishment of absolute security and order. Until he had bowed the vast empire to his will, until it was safe to walk alone where previously robbers and cut-throats had lurked, all idea of a 'liberalizing' regime was premature. The imposing of such peace on Arabia, and the reactions both from it and on it of his scheme of reforms, conducted as much in the name of Islam as in that of his own dynasty, really constitute the story of Ibn Sa'ud's later career.

THE CAUSE OF IBN SA'UD

Wahhabism in Arabia — Ibn Sa'ud's Impress on the Peninsula — British Testimony to his Merits — Attitude of neighbouring States — Impulse to Arab Nationalism

WAHHABISM is not dominant in Arabia, though the cause of Ibn Sa'ud has triumphed. The two factors may be differentiated, may tend, conceivably, to become more and more distinct. For although to the pleasure-lacking and pleasure-denying zealots of Central Arabia the primitive creed which Muhammad Abdul Wahhab annunciated or re-announced may be adequate, there are parts of the Peninsula which might be expected to adopt Wahhabism only through *force majeure*, that is, insincerely. In Ibn Sa'ud's own kingdom, indeed, not every Muslim is a Wahhabi; there are, for example, numbers of Shiahls in the Hasa. Nor is it to be thought that the Zaidis of the Yaman, fanatical and proud, would ever change their faith to the simpler code of the Puritans. This code is in all its severity suitable, in short, primarily for those Muslims who have never known and do not desire to know the richer, more coloured world outside their habitual range.

Let there be no misunderstanding in this matter. Not because it is primitive, still less because it is reactionary, is the Wahhabi faith unlikely to gain many more converts from the settled population of Arabia, but mainly because of the intolerance it harbours and encourages. To such Sunni Arabs as have nothing to gain from, and are temperamentally opposed to, tolerance of forms of religion other than their own, the creed will continue to make appeal, as it appealed last century to Arabs as far south as the Yaman and the Indian Ocean coasts of Oman. But to the more progressively-minded Arab of the north, of Iraq, Transjordan, Syria, and Palestine, the attractions of Wahhabism as such glitter but dimly; these Arabs have thrown in their lot irrevocably with the West, in their relationship with which intolerance could have a place harmful only to themselves and stultifying their most cherished desire of advancement.

But if Wahhabism in the doctrinal sense may be confined approximately to its present limits, the faith, in its moral or general sense, and particularly as personified by King Abdul Aziz, has far wider possibilities. None but the enthusiast will use the word 'permanent' in connection with Arabia, but the impress which this Puritan King has made on the Peninsula is in all probability deeper than that made by any single man since the Prophet. Even those Arab rulers whose subjects are non-Wahhabi admire him. Freely or grudgingly, but all at last, they have made known the

THE CAUSE OF IBN SA'UD

respect in which they hold him. On the north, King Faisal of Iraq and (though very belatedly) the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan, on the south-west, the Imam Yahya of the Yaman — these three rulers have all paid their tribute to the personality and the achievement of Ibn Sa'ud. Nor, on the Gulf side, is admiration of him withheld by the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, the various chiefs of the Trucial or Pirate Coast and the rulers of such principalities as Kuwait and Bahrain. Even over the greater part of the dreaded Great Southern Desert his binding personality has enjoined peace.

If, therefore, King Abdul Aziz has achieved this dominant position while scarcely relaxing the rigours of his faith, how much greater may his influence be in Islam when the militant, contemptuous side of Wahhabism is softened! And is not increased contact with the West bound so to soften it? Political progress of the Wahhabi Empire must imply a lessening of the drastic intensity of its 'Fundamentalism'. The religious urge, which is the bedrock of the State, must remain, but of itself alone it cannot perpetuate the Empire; rather would it, if unmodified by Western contacts, tend to disruption, through the cutting-off of Arabia by civilized peoples, or by the Wahhabis' dashing themselves vainly against the brick wall of their better equipped neighbours.

This Puritan Arabia, then, will abide Puritan, if it is to remain a unified whole, but its austerities will

be chastened. For the furthering of such a process, which must inevitably take some time, King Abdul Aziz is the very instrument. No one doubts his sincerity or his zeal for Islam and Arabia; he alone, perhaps, is capable of persuading the self-contained and self-satisfied inhabitants of Central Arabia that in the world of Islam there is room for more than one school, even if the more obnoxious Muslims do have to have their idolatrous customs curtailed when on Pilgrimage, and that friendly relations with Christian Powers — Christians and Jews being equally with the Muslims 'People of a Book' — are meritorious and advantageous rather than a blemish on the name of Wahhabism.

All those Europeans who have personally met King Abdul Aziz are convinced of his tremendous capacity to mould opinion in Arabia. From those Englishmen who knew him, then but a comparatively humble chieftain in Najd, before the War, to those who met him for the first time as King of the Hijaz-Najd, the verdict is unanimous: he is a man in a million. Sir Percy Cox, Captain Shakespear, Lord Belhaven and Stenton, Mr. St. John Philby, Colonel H. R. P. Dickson, Sir Gilbert Clayton, Sir Francis Humphrys — all these men, representative of different schools of thought, have paid their tribute to the compelling personality and large-heartedness of the Wahhabi King. British Political officers do not always agree on the merits of a particular Oriental

THE CAUSE OF IBN SA'UD

notable; their enthusiasms are not easy to arouse. But on Ibn Sa'ud there is but one judgment. Primarily, perhaps, he appeals to the British because of his essentially manly qualities, and because of the frankness and directness of his address. Sir Percy Cox, indeed, whose wisdom, patience and counsel were a byword when he was in service in the East, once declared in my hearing that King Abdul Aziz in his long reign had never made a mistake: it is a dictum which will not be seriously disputed by anyone who has studied the facts.

So cordial has British official sentiment, generally speaking, been towards Ibn Sa'ud, in fact, that those who have supported the cause of other Arab rulers have not refrained from the jibe that his rise to power would have been impossible without the British bulwark. The jibe miscarries: for the simple reason that, with the exception of the Imam Yahya of the Yaman, there is in Arabia to-day not a ruler who owes no debt to the British. With particular inapplicability is this criticism made by adherents of the Sharifian dynasty, which derived from the initiative of the British its very chance of gaining power and, from their continued support, the consolidation of that power. Nor is it true that throughout his career and for all his aims Ibn Sa'ud has received British official support. It has been seen how, although the Political Department of the Government of India looked on him favourably from a very early date, the British

I B N S A ' U D

Government in the later stages of the War and immediately afterwards were inclined to envisage the Arabian problem solely as one of Sharifian expansion. It is also true that, owing to the violent *Ikhwan* raids upon Iraq and Transjordan, there was at times a quite natural and justifiable tension between the British Government as Mandatory Power and the Government of Ibn Sa'ud. The fact remains, however, that there is scarcely any Englishman — or, for that matter, any European or American — who has met the Wahhabi King that is not convinced that in him is such a man as the Peninsula has not produced for many generations and that the prolongation of his life will be an asset not only to Arabia and to Islam but also to the general world.

But kindly sentiments alone can accomplish nothing in the desert. For long Abdul Aziz was as a voice in the wilderness of Arabia. His neighbours during the post-War years were too busy shaping their own affairs to worry over, still less to recognize, his significance. More than once war has been threatened between the Hijaz-Najd and the Yaman. Not until a personal meeting was made between King Faisal of Iraq and King Ibn Sa'ud was there real peace between Iraq and Najd. And it is only as this book is being published that mutual recognition and a treaty are being attempted between the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan and the Wahhabi monarch.

Yet time has been on Ibn Sa'ud's side. What Arabia

THE CAUSE OF IBN SA'UD

now wants is to develop her resources, and she realizes, as never before, that that can be done only on a foundation of peace. Hence, in large measure, the recent agreements with Ibn Sa'ud, the durability and stability of whose regime appear to have surprised non-Wahhabi opinion.

All is well, however, that, for whatever reason, ends well, and even if a change of attitude has preceded a change of heart, there is always hope that a course of correct behaviour, together with the advantages it brings, may achieve a real conversion.

One thing, at any rate, no Arab can dispute, and that is that the success of King Ibn Sa'ud has given a tremendous fillip to the cause of Arab Nationalism. It is outside the scope of this book to discuss the desirability or the effects of the rise or the resurgence of Arab Nationalism, but quite patently this popular movement is destined to affect Western Asia profoundly.

The birth of Arab Nationalism is generally held to have coincided with the movement of the Young Turks, some few years before the War, to 'Turkify' the non-Turkish population of the Ottoman Empire. In the sense of a definite political urge to attain self-government, Arab Nationalism may be said accurately enough then to have been born, but in the wider, less political, sense it really dates from the emergence of the Wahhabis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they successfully defied the Ottoman

I B N S A ' U D

Government which was endeavouring to quell them. From that time the ideal of Arab, as opposed to or distinct from Ottoman, government, was never quite lost. It was revived, though in a modified form, by the Rashid dynasty of Ha'il in the second half of the nineteenth century; nor were the struggles of the Imam Yahya of the Yaman in the earlier part of the twentieth century without some influence upon the aspirations of the Arabs in general. It is, however, the Wahhabi Empire which has given the greatest stimulus to the Arab Nationalist movement. Apart from the Imam Yahya, Ibn Sa'ud alone of living Arab rulers has carved out his own destiny without the aid of non-Arab arms, as he alone has administered his country without the assistance of non-Muslim advisers. This is keenly recognized by the Arabic-speaking peoples, nor are they slow to conceal their pride in the achievement of a purely Arab regime and government. One manifestation of Arab regeneration from inside is, it is felt, worth a dozen imitations by Arabs of Western codes of freedom.

Ibn Sa'ud, however, is not to be drawn away by any dreams of an Arab Utopia, a Pan-Arabia in which all are brothers, subjects of one central government or of federated governments. This vision has occupied many thoughtful minds; it may be said to be the tendency of most educated Arabs; it is an ideal which has moved even non-Arabs to admiration. But the Wahhabi King is too occupied with realities to afford

THE CAUSE OF IBN SA‘UD

much time to schemes which, whatever the future may hold in store for Arabia, are at the moment nebulous and unrealizable. The unity of Arabia is a political myth, as no one knows better than Ibn Sa‘ud. Nevertheless, the memory of the Arabs' greatness, of the time when they headed the march of civilization, is still vivid and can never die; yet whereas some Arabs think of the splendours of Damascus and Baghdad, the Wahhabi conqueror thinks rather of the glories of the first four Caliphs, who ruled from Medina, than of the later Ummayad and Abbasid Caliphs who, if they brought fame, also brought corruption to the world of Islam. In no conceivable Arab polity, moreover, would the Wahhabis be content to take second place; they hold themselves to be *the* Arabs, the real sons of the free and uncontaminated desert. To attempt prophecy in Arabia would be contrary to the whole tenor of this book, but it does look as if the component parts of Arabia, each with different resources, will for some time to come develop along individual rather than collective lines. Customs barriers, which are but one of the results of the War, after which Arabia was divided into artificial States, may well be banished within the Peninsula, but the unity of the land may be seen more in the commercial than in any other sphere.

Yet however remote the prospect of a Pan-Arabia, it remains true that, largely owing to the efforts and accomplishments of King Abdul Aziz, the common

I B N S A ' U D

Arab of to-day has more dignity and more confidence in his future than at any time since the Mongols overran Iraq and destroyed a rich and fertile civilization. The moral urge works out in the Arab in all kinds of ways, but certainly increase has been given to it by the development and the serenity of the Wahhabi Empire. For there, at any rate, there is no façade of 'progress', no civilization save that which has been produced by Arab brains and Arab vigour for the ends of Islam.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Ibn Sa‘ud’s Place in Islam — Two Schools, Modernist and ‘Back to the Book,’ First Principles or Secularization?

Now may be approached certain questions which will have been present in the minds of many readers of this biography: Is not the whole trend of Ibn Sa‘ud’s rule, the very ideal for which he stands, contrary to the spirit of the age, that is, to the tendency towards secularization? Is not agnosticism (they may ask), or atheism, or even indifference sweeping over the world, the Islamic world included? Is there not, at any rate, an increasing disposition to separate matters of religion from matters of State?

Such questions are pertinent, and they cannot be burked. Those who criticize the Puritan King commonly claim that practically everywhere in the Muslim world save in his domain, certainly in its more enlightened sections, the battle of secularization, if not already triumphant, is in effect a won cause. In such countries as Turkey and Egypt, they say, patriotism or nationalism on the Western model has quite usurped the place hitherto held by religion;

in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, they assert, perhaps less unqualifiedly, the same tendency is visible; and even in Persia and Afghanistan the reforming movement must, they think, end in the depressing of religion to a subordinate place in State affairs, if it is not already ousted to the realm of individual conscience. 'Westernization', 'modernization' — this is the process which such critics hail as the all-important feature of the Islamic States, more particularly, of course, of the independent Islamic States; for in those countries in which Mussulmans are in a minority or in which they are subjects of a non-Muslim Power, the distinguishing mark of their faith is naturally adhered to and cherished.

Superficially, no doubt, this description of Muslim States is true: the thoughts of their leading men are formed on Western ideals. And, it is argued, since the *intelligentsia* of these countries play a part in the national life out of all proportion to their numbers — it is a feature from which the West is not immune — the reformation or the revision of Islam is certain.

This revision is, as must be granted at once, a conclusion from which no student of Islam can escape. But generalization on Islamic countries is dangerous. There is a proclivity to take Turkey as the exemplar, and to assume, with a certain air of Western superiority, that all the other Muslim lands will follow, as a matter of course, albeit with varying speeds, the lead of the great reformer, Mustafa Kemal Pasha. This seems to

RELIGION AND POLITICS

me by no means certain. For one thing, Turkey, in throwing out the Semitic bath of Islam, is also throwing out the Arab baby. Islam is no longer the State religion of Turkey, and under the impulse of the Ghazi the Turks are resolutely endeavouring to cast away all the accretions that grew on and round the Ottoman State since their forefathers adopted the faith of the Prophet Muhammad. Everything savouring of the Arab heritage is being put away.

Now whether or not such a reforming movement affects also the inner religion of the Turks is a matter with which this book is not concerned, but it can hardly induce Arabs generally, whose *amour propre* at the actions of the Turks in dispensing with their Semitic legacy cannot be favourably stirred, to follow slavishly the pattern of the Ghazi. Admittedly, a considerable number of Arab leaders to-day profess only to follow the dictates of the Islamic religion: some do not even so profess.

But there is no particular reason to believe that the future of the world is with the godless. Islam will not die. Though secularization of Muslim States may involve a modification of Islam, it does not necessarily involve its extinction, even though, as in Turkey, the practice of religion is taking less conspicuous and less abundant forms than previously. But the Turks were always a race apart. Conceivably they might forgo their faith; assuredly the Semitic Arabs will not.

The lands which were successively vouchsafed the

revelations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will not readily revert to the creed of pagans. Spiritual forces endure; in the long run, indeed, they win. The brains and driving-force of politicians may for a time keep up the helm of State, but there needs some larger, impersonal control (which religion alone, probably, can supply) to maintain it in smooth waters. Possibly, indeed, the Middle East has in store some striking manifestation of this truth.

There are, however, learned men in Islam who realize these things. Long before the Great War there was a ferment in Islamic thought, and educated Indians, Egyptians, Arabs and others were considering the suitability of their religion to the conditions of modern life, and this, independently of the political status of the lands in which they happened to be living. The movements in India and in Egypt were of particular interest. The Mussulmans in India for some time after the Munity of 1857 were downcast, and what exhortation they received was mainly of a crude Puritanical type. 'Back to the Book,' they were commanded. Yet this was inadequate for the lively Indian intelligence. Mainly owing to the initiative of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who founded the institution that ultimately became the University of Aligarh, there arose a school of Muslim thinkers whose primary idea was to restore the purity of Islam. One of the tenets now widely held by their pupils is that the emphasizing of race-consciousness — the feature

RELIGION AND POLITICS

that in recent years has distinguished Western Asia — was contrary to the international character of Islam, and should be resisted. This reforming movement in India has had many facets and many phases. Sometimes it has desired to take from Western culture all that may be good for Islam, sometimes to reject Western culture and rely almost entirely on the Quran for rules of conduct. But in the main it is fair to say that the restoration of the Muslim faith to its pristine purity and the spurning of all unnecessary innovations have been its principal aims. Politics have led many Indian Mussulmans into by paths, where they may have become side-tracked or even bogged, but on the whole the urge is towards purification and simplicity.

The potential affinity of this endeavour with the ideals of King Abdul Aziz will be obvious.

In Egypt, a school of thought arose with even closer approximation to the ideals later held and practised by the Puritan King.

Towards the end of last century, a noted reformer journeyed to Cairo from Afghanistan — Jamal-ud-din. His words found quick echo in Egyptian hearts. Under the inspiration of the Grand Mufti, Shaikh Muhammad Abdu, there were taught at the University of Al Azhar doctrines which were practically indistinguishable from those formulated in the eighteenth century by the very man after whom the Wahhabis are named: Muhammad Abdul Wahhab.

There was no organic connection between Muhammad Abdu and the Wahhabis, who, indeed, in his day were relapsed into insignificance and whose resurgence was scarcely dreamed of: it was simply a case of arriving at the same goal by different routes.

Now the teachings of Muhammad Abdu did not dominate Egypt: the Land of the Nile, in fact, is one of the few Muslim countries which to-day lack regular relations with the Wahhabi Empire. But his precepts have not been forgotten; his pupils still work towards a re-interpretation of Islam; and although there is this great distinction between his disciples and the *Ikhwan* of Najd — that whereas the former are tolerant of others, the Najdis would violently enforce their ideas — the ground which they have in common is something upon which expectations may not unreasonably be entertained that ultimately a simpler and wider code of Islam may be built. It should by no means be supposed, therefore, that Wahhabism, or what in effect is Wahhabism, lacks all intellectual basis.

I am not, of course, wishing to suggest that all the less politically minded intellectuals in Islam favour the doctrines, still less the practices, of the Wahhabis: far from it. Apart from the probably increasing number of Mussulmans who dispense entirely with religion, there are schools of thought which, by their application of modern scientific methods of criticism, demolish, or affect to demolish, many of the older notions, Wahhabism included. It is common, indeed,

RELIGION AND POLITICS

to draw an antithesis between the 'Modernists', as such critics are called, and the other reformers who belong to the movement known as 'Back to the Book'. In this dispute there is, and can be, no finality. Each age brings its discoveries and its disillusionments, and Islam is likely to be no more free from the oscillation of opinion than Christendom has been and continues to be.

Approximately, therefore, there are three main forces at work in Islam¹: the Secularists, among whom may be classed most of the leaders in Turkey, and many in such countries as Egypt, Iraq, Persia, and Afghanistan; the Modernists, of whom Egypt so far has produced the greatest number; and the Reactionaries, among whom the Wahhabis may be classed. The first aim above all at the regeneration or the reconstruction of their respective States; if external Islam likes to help them, so much the better, but the primary desire is to make their particular countries progressive, stable entities. The second seek in effect to give academic sanction for many of the things which the Secularists have already done, namely, to prove that the political and the religious aspects of Islam should be, and originally were, distinct (the usual conception being that the Islamic society was an indivisible whole). And the third might be identified, generally, with the 'Literalists'

¹ This classification is extremely rough, if serviceable; many exceptions will be found to it.

or the 'Fundamentalists', claiming infallibility for every word spoken and every thing done by the Prophet.

Inevitably, King Abdul Aziz must go into the last category. He holds no truck with secularization; as has been seen, he bases his whole administration on the Muslim Holy Law, the *Shar'*. He knows no intellectuals, and would probably despise them if he did. But it is important to note that he has a footing in more than one Islamic camp. He governs the Hijaz-Najd for the glory of Islam, indeed, and for that service has earned the gratitude of countless Muslims. But he has his own ambition. He is conscious of his Arab Empire. He knows that Arabs, not to mention non-Arabs, revere him as a regenerator, a leader of their race. He thus has certain very definite affinities with the Arab Nationalists in other countries whose main endeavour is towards independence and Westernization; the racial link cannot be denied, however different the respective attitudes towards life may be. Again, he meets the Modernists on their own ground in cutting away all the medieval accumulations on the Islamic faith. He, like they, wants bedrock and bedrock alone. It is a remarkable position that he holds — perhaps I ought to say a remarkable influence that he exerts — in three separate camps.

In the general problem in the Islamic world, then, of whether to return to first principles, or to discard whatever is necessary in the process of 'modernization',

RELIGION AND POLITICS

the Wahhabi King unquestionably favours the first alternative. Outside the Quran, freedom of action is permissible, but where the Holy Book enjoins, so must implicit obedience be: that is the guiding-star of his faith. Yet, in estimating his position in Islam, it must be remembered that he has this tremendous advantage over all other leaders of thought: that through his control of the Holy Places he can influence thousands, nay, millions of the Faithful. For Mecca is not now merely a meeting-place, a home for the performance of duty, but a rallying-ground, a source of inspiration and renewal and stimulation, such as it has not been for many a day. And what the various sects see of Mecca will surely inform their opinion of Wahhabism.

Possession of the Holy Places cannot be overestimated. Even the Wahhabis of the first Empire created many converts among non-Arabs. In India, for instance, an intense Wahhabi movement started about the beginning of the nineteenth century, and before the Punjab was conquered by the British there was for a few years a Wahhabi State there. Nor did the work of these early converts die. Even to this day there are many Indian Mussulmans who are in effect Wahhabis, though the appellation is not used.¹ Similarly in the Dutch East Indies, whither in the early part of last century some *hajjis* returned fired

¹ The *Ahl-i-Hadith* (People of Tradition), who are but one section of the descendants of these Indian Wahhabis, are sufficiently numerous to receive regular mention in the Census of India.

I B N S A ' U D

with enthusiasm over what they had seen at Mecca and determined to purify the Islam as practised by their brothers. In the Sudan, a similar Wahhabi movement was set on foot. And the Sanusis, who extended not only over North Africa and Arabia but even to the Malay Archipelago, derived directly from the impetus given by the first Wahhabi Empire.

If the uncompromising, uncultured, violent Wahhabis of the earlier regime could accomplish such conversions, who shall say what repercussions the wiser and more prudent regime of King Abdul Aziz may have in Islam?

THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM

Is Wahhabism a mere Ebullience? — Can it survive Ibn Sa‘ud’s Death? — Disintegrating Factors of Arab tribal character — Considerations of Religion, Politics, and Economics

THE questions considered in the last chapter do not exhaust the armoury of the sceptics. Is not the entire regime of Ibn Sa‘ud, they ask, the work of one man? And will it not crash when he falls? Is not Wahhabism in itself but an ebullience of the desert, destined, like all Puritan systems, to swell and then — explode into nothingness?

Now at once it may be admitted that the present Wahhabi Empire is the handiwork of Ibn Sa‘ud alone. He had, truly, the assistance of certain favourable factors, but in the main the edifice has been built by his hands and no other. Yet it was not only personal ambition which raised the imposing structure of his realm. There was the driving force of his religion, which, even in other hands, would surely have made itself felt in Arabia, and that force will of a certainty survive his death, at any rate in Central Arabia. It is his control, his direction of that force,

I B N S A ' U D

which has placed him where he now is, as it is his unceasing endeavour so to inform that force as to give to his kingdom lasting foundations.

The first Wahhabi Empire was wrecked finally because another Muslim Power, Egypt, invaded and defeated the Wahhabis. The repetition of such a circumstance is almost inconceivable to-day. No existing Muslim State would consider it worth its while, even if it considered it desirable, to invade the Hijaz-Najd; from the material point of view alone the prizes are insufficient. Nor is there anywhere such antipathy as was felt towards the Wahhabis of the first Empire. Only through internal disintegration, therefore, can this second Wahhabi Empire disappear.

To those who regard this Empire of Ibn Sa'ud as but a flash in the pan, an essentially unstable and ephemeral phenomenon, one thing may be freely granted: the world of Islam will not willingly go over to such an ascetic form of religion, nor harbour such intolerance, as is practised by the Najdis. More than once Islam has had the opportunity of accepting a 'Literalist' exposition: rejection has been its unchanging answer. But if Najd is, as has been previously suggested, to remain fundamentally as rigid as it now is, it by no means follows that a similar cast-iron frame will always be imposed on the Hijaz, and, therefore, on the thousands of Muslims who make the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Neither the character of the Hijazi people nor the traditions of the country

THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM

would allow indefinitely any such cramping. If Wahhabism is to endure there, it must, therefore, become more enlightened, more elastic — in a word, more educated. Nor are signs wanting that such a process has already begun. Education alone must result in some modification of Puritanism, and under the stress of economic circumstance such developments may take place, are, indeed, about to take place, as must result in a widening of the outlook of the mass of the inhabitants. But this process will take time: the character neither of town nor of tribal Arab can be reformed in a generation.

History has dealt hardly with Puritan systems as a whole, and generally they have been followed by reaction. But the Puritanism of the Arabian desert is different from other forms which might be thought to go into the same category. The repressions or inhibitions from which the Wahhabis suffer are not, generally speaking, felt to be such, simply because the opportunities of indulging, or the incentives to, 'sinful' actions do not exist. The desert breeds few passions of an irreligious nature, still less of an anti-religious nature; and were the Wahhabi Empire to collapse, there would be in the desert no 'Restoration', but merely anarchy.

Nor is this danger of anarchy to be lightly dismissed. Ibn Sa'ud, whose every act betrays his desire that his kingdom shall survive his death, knows the Arab character well enough to be aware that its fissiparous

I B N S A ' U D

tendencies would of a surety wreck any State built on tribal foundations alone. It was largely as a result of reflecting on that knowledge that he instituted his reform of the *hijra* movement, settling nomads on the land. That, however, is insufficient. For geographical reasons alone, there remain a considerable number of Badawin, who, though they may be peaceful enough in years of plenty, would rest quiescent in years of drought only from fear of their ruler's wrath. These men it is who really constitute the problem of the Wahhabi Empire. Can means be found to maintain their economic welfare? How long Arabia will stay tribal it is impossible to guess. In the more civilized sections to the north of Sa'udi Arabia, the tendency of the tribes is, more and more, to become settled on the land: the process is most marked in Iraq, where even during the last few years tribesmen hitherto nomadic have largely become settled cultivators. But in the Land of the Two Rivers the possibility of making a living from the soil exists. Is there such a prospect in Najd?

As I see it, the problem which really faces Ibn Sa'ud's State is primarily not religious, still less political, but economic. Economics at all times and everywhere precede and are more permanent than politics; nor is a religious basis alone sufficient to make a kingdom endure. In the religious sphere King Abdul Aziz is great enough to distinguish between the desires of Najd and the desires of the

THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM

Hijaz, and in these two countries the distinction between an undiluted Puritanism and an enlightened Puritanism may increasingly be seen. The force of his personality is adequate to create and to meet the dichotomy. In the political sphere, his personal genius for diplomacy has overcome all obstacles: there is no serious ground for misgivings on that score.

But economically, what is the position of the country? The Pilgrimage, as the preceding pages have shown, is its capital asset, but whether it is an increasing or decreasing asset is unpredictable. There are those who assert that, with the progressive education of Mussulmans, it will decline, and, more particularly, that the easier and more comfortable it is made, the less will be the longing to accomplish the journey to Mecca. Such observers emphasize the notion widely held that the more difficult the road to Mecca the more meritorious the Pilgrimage, and that, if railways are built to convey *hajjis* to and from the Holy City, the changed nature of the journey may be positively distasteful to many Muslims.

Yet this is guess-work. It has sometimes been thought that the Pilgrim Railway from Damascus to Medina has resulted in a decrease in the number of Pilgrims before the War. But no statistics are available. I state these pessimistic views merely to note the fact that reliance on the Pilgrimage presents obvious difficulties to those responsible for the finances of

Sa'udi Arabia. On the other hand, the Pilgrimage is an integral part of the very religion of Islam.

And what else is there in the Hijaz-Najd? The pearl trade? But pearls, which formerly brought wealth to Wahhabi ports on the Persian Gulf, languish sadly. Yet the trade may revive. That possibility, however, can scarcely be entertained of the trade in camels, which in previous centuries was one of the principal items of commerce among the Najdis and their neighbours. The camel trade is dead, and, but for a very limited market, has no prospect of recovery. It is very largely because of this particular change in Arabia, indeed, that the Iraqi tribes have taken in such numbers to agriculture. And oil in the Hassa? And minerals in the Hijaz? They alike belong to the realm of hope rather than to present practicality.

Incomparably, therefore, the least malleable problem confronting King Abdul Aziz lies in economics. At best, the Hijaz-Najd can hardly be expected to provide much of a margin to the majority of its inhabitants: the land is not blessed of Heaven in the material sense.

But at least this can be said: that if any man can bring to this barren territory a source of lasting prosperity, as he has already brought lasting peace, King Abdul Aziz is he.

I N D E X

INDEX

ABDU, Muhammad, 279, 280
Abdullah (Amir of Transjordan), 103, 104, 114, 115, 116, 118, 125, 126, 153, 154, 157, 159, 164, 168, 179, 238, 267, 270
Abha, 124
Abu Ghar, 145, 168, 215, 221
Afghanistan, 184, 193, 279, 281
Aflaj, 51, 52
Ahmad, Sayyid, 278
Ajman, 68, 85, 93, 97, 99, 106, 222, 226, 228, 229, 230, 231, 262
Ajlun, 27, 28
Alayya, Jabal, 51
Alcohol, 77, 91
Aleppo, 41
Algiers, 194
Ali (King of the Hijaz), 164, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 177
 —— Muhammad, 16, 32, 41
Aligarh, 178
Allenby, General, 112
Amarat Anaiza, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147, 148
American Missions, 262
Amghar, 160
Amman, 138, 156, 159, 168, 179, 241, 242
Anaiza (town), 56, 57, 61
 —— (tribe), 30, 141, 143, 231
Antonius, G., 200
Aqaba, 178, 183, 212
Arab Bureau, 95, 113
 —— Nationalism, 90, 92, 271, 272, 273, 274, 282
 —— Revolt, 92, 97, 98, 102, 122
Arafat, 192, 213
 'Araif, Al, 57, 68, 71
Aridh, 47, 50, 51
Armistice, the, 109, 112
Arnold, Sir Thomas, 190
Artawiya, 81, 92, 94, 226, 227, 228, 260
Asil, Najji al, 163
Asir, 70, 91, 123, 124, 125, 206, 207, 246
Ataiba, 43, 55, 70, 82, 103, 163, 164, 170, 222, 226, 231, 260, 261
Awazim, 231, 261
Ayaina, 29, 30
Azhar, Al, 279
Azraq, Qasr al, 155
BADAWIN, 10, 11, 21, 32, 33, 41, 43, 50, 59, 61, 63, 74, 78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 85, 88, 106, 108, 116, 128, 136, 138, 150, 153, 168, 175, 201, 216, 219, 223, 226, 230, 239, 246, 248, 251, 255, 257, 260, 288
Baghdad, 29, 40, 41, 106, 125, 138, 139, 140, 141, 144, 182, 218, 229, 235, 237, 273
Bahra, 182, 210
 —— Treaty of, 182, 183, 184, 200, 215
Bahrain, 40, 96, 136, 211, 262, 267
Balfour Declaration, 122
Basra, 34, 37, 91, 100, 101, 145, 219, 220, 262
Batin, Al, 25, 136, 149, 150, 232
Belgium, 197
Belhaven and Stenton, Lord (Col. R. E. A. Hamilton), 100, 105, 109, 268
Bell, Gertrude, 94, 146
Bijad, Sultan ibn, 169, 170, 172, 222, 227
Biscoe, Col. H. V., 234
Bukairiya, 61, 62, 63
Buraida, 47, 57, 61, 65, 68
Burckhardt, J. L., 188
Burton, Sir Richard, 252
Busaiya, 215, 216, 217, 221, 235
CAIRO, 43, 45, 101, 113, 157, 192, 194, 279

INDEX

Caliph (Caliphate), 40, 76, 161, 164, 165, 166, 171, 192, 259, 273
 Camel Corps (Iraq), 144, 145, 215
 Carmathians, 75
 Clayton, Sir Gilbert, 182, 184, 200, 210, 212, 220, 221, 229, 235, 268
 Conference, Grand Muslim, 175, 180, 181, 193, 194, 195, 201
 Constantinople, 16, 19, 43
 Cox, Sir Percy, 93, 95, 100, 101, 140, 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 152, 158, 268, 269
 Crane, Charles, 252
 Cromwell, Oliver, 10, 26, 27, 195
 Cunliffe-Owen, Lt.-Col., 105
 Curzon, Lord, 112, 115
 Cyprus, 179
 DAHNA, 51
 Damascus, 29, 41, 69, 194, 273, 289
 Darnluji, Abdullah al, 139, 198, 205
 Dar'iya, 16, 30, 33, 37, 43
 Dawasir, 51, 52, 82, 261
 Dhafir, 139, 140, 143, 144, 146, 147, 148, 150, 168, 231
 Dibba (Dhaba), 245
 Dickson, Col. H. R. P., 142, 268
 Dilam, 53
 Doughty, C. M., 17, 57
 Drought, 55, 68, 130, 226, 242, 251, 288
 Dutch East Indies, 194, 197, 251, 283
 Duwish, Faisal al, 127, 128, 129, 137, 138, 146, 160, 210, 217, 222, 226, 227, 228, 230, 232, 238, 240
 ECONOMIC FACTOR, 31, 74, 79, 80, 226, 242, 250, 288, 289, 290
 Education, 261, 262, 287
 Egypt (Egyptians), 16, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 78, 101, 102, 108, 112, 184, 193, 198, 238, 246, 248, 250, 262, 275, 278, 279, 280, 281, 296
 Euphrates, 36, 141, 142
 FAISAL (King of Iraq), 103, 114, 121, 122, 125, 127, 142, 143, 144, 151, 154, 157, 159, 168, 177, 235, 236, 237, 238, 267, 270
 Fakhri Pasha, 104
 Fevzi, Ahmad, 61
 Fowle, T. C. W., Col., 234
 France (French), 122, 125, 152, 154, 197, 198, 199, 243
 Fuad Hamza, 205, 237
 GERMANY, 19, 97, 136, 197
 Ghalib, Grand Sharif, 34, 36, 37
 Ghatghat, 170, 226, 228, 260
 Ghazzu (raids, raiding), 60, 80, 138, 139, 155, 157, 160, 166, 183, 217, 218, 219, 226, 236, 239, 240, 241, 245, 251, 259, 260
 Gibb, H. A. R., 195
 Gold, 77, 190, 252
 Great Britain (British Government, British Empire), 20, 39, 52, 61, 87, 89, 90, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 119, 120, 121, 122, 125, 127, 136, 137, 139, 140, 142, 144, 152, 153, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 171, 172, 174, 177, 178, 179, 182, 184, 197, 198, 199, 200, 210, 211, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 220, 232, 235, 237, 241, 243, 269, 270
 HACHAIM, BANI, 217
 Hadda, 170, 171
 — Treaty of, 182, 183, 184, 200, 239
 Hadhdhal, Fahad ibn, 140, 141, 143
 Hafar, 25, 52, 136, 145
 Hail, 17, 20, 22, 29, 45, 46, 48, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 65, 68, 73, 85, 90, 91, 93, 99, 106, 107, 110, 111, 123, 125, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 139, 140, 141, 148, 153, 154, 159, 181, 198, 214, 239, 241, 246, 248, 272
 Hali, 37
 Hanbalis, 33, 188
 Haradh, 25
 Harb, 43, 66, 231, 261
 Hariq, 51, 68, 261
 Harrison, Paul, 131
 Hasa, Al, 20, 25, 26, 34, 44, 45, 46, 67, 73, 75, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 99, 106, 149, 228, 229, 230, 231, 252, 265, 290

INDEX

Hazzani (clan), 68, 72
 Hijaz, The, 34, 36, 37, 39, 44, 69, 73, 97, 98, 102, 103, 104, 107, 112, 114, 119, 123, 135, 145, 161, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 179, 180, 181, 184, 185, 186, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 208, 209, 210, 212, 213, 214, 222, 228, 236, 245, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 254, 261, 267, 268, 270, 286, 290
 — Railway, 156, 168
Hijras, 80, 82, 104, 222, 226, 259, 260, 261, 288
 Hilmi, Abbas, 251
 Hithlain, Dhaidan ibn, 222, 229, 230
 — Naif ibn, 230, 232
 Hogarth, D. G., 7
 Holland (Netherlands), 197, 198, 199
 Holy Land (of Islam), 7, 34, 36, 69, 119, 165, 170, 180, 185, 191, 201, 208
 Holy Places, 34, 36, 40, 96, 120, 164, 167, 180, 181, 186, 192, 283
 Hudaifa, 206
 Hufuf, 86, 87
 Humaid, Ibn, 226
 Humphrys, Sir Francis, 235, 268
 Husain (Sharif and King), 69, 70, 71, 85, 90, 92, 95, 96, 97, 98, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 142, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 171, 172, 173, 175, 178, 179, 186, 191, 192, 198, 258
 Huwaitat, 239, 240, 241

I
 IBRAHIM PASHA, 16, 43
 Idolatry, 75, 173, 191, 268
 Idrisi of Asir, 91, 123, 296, 246
Ikhwan, 79, 81, 82, 83, 104, 119, 123, 124, 127, 129, 131, 135, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 144, 145, 146, 151, 155, 156, 157, 160, 163, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 175, 182, 201, 208, 209, 210, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 226, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236, 237, 238, 239, 241, 259, 261, 266, 270, 274, 276, 281
 Iraq (Mesopotamia), 19, 36, 41, 75, 84, 93, 96, 101, 102, 105, 106, 110, 113, 114, 122, 125, 126, 127, 130, 131, 132, 135, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147, 148, 149, 151, 154, 158, 159, 169, 181, 182, 183, 184, 193, 198, 211, 214, 216, 217, 218, 220, 221, 226, 229, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236, 237, 238, 239, 241, 259, 261, 266, 270, 274, 276, 281
 Italy, 198

J
 JABRIN, 25
 Jahra, 137, 138, 217
 Janissaries, 83, 222
 Jarishan, 219
 Jarrah, 92, 93, 97, 98, 106
 Jarrad, Husain ibn, 56
 Jauf, 126, 129, 154, 155, 168, 169, 239, 240
 Jazira, 141, 148
 Jerusalem, 179, 220
 Jidda, 38, 118, 122, 163, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 181, 182, 186, 197, 199, 200, 201, 203, 204, 210, 220, 221, 238, 242, 247, 248, 251, 262
 Jiddah (Treaty of), 211, 212
 Jifan, Abu, 26
Jihad (Holy War), 17, 33, 78, 151, 209, 210, 219, 220, 226
 Jiluwi, Abdullah ibn, 25, 28, 56, 68, 229, 231
 — Fahad ibn, 229, 230
 Jizan, 206
 Jordan, F. R., 199, 200
 Jubail (uplands), 26
 — (Persian Gulf), 95, 248
 Jumaima, 217

K
 KAABA, 38, 75
 Karaman, 263
 Karbala, 36, 37, 39, 218
 Kemal, Mustafa, 164, 276, 277

INDEX

Kharj, 51, 52, 53, 261
 Khurma, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108,
 111, 114, 116, 117, 121, 123, 126,
 145, 159, 168, 170
 Knox, Lt.-Col. S. G., 159
 Kuwait, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26,
 48, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 61, 65, 88,
 89, 96, 99, 100, 101, 106, 110, 111,
 123, 135, 136, 138, 142, 150, 151,
 159, 211, 217, 219, 220, 226, 229,
 231, 232, 234, 240, 262, 267
 — (Conference of) 159, 160,
 162, 165

LAMI, IBN, 232
 Lawrence, T. E., 42, 92, 101, 105,
 122, 127, 156, 163
 Leachman, Col. G. E., 86
 Lith, 175
 Luhaya, 206
 Lupin, H.M.S., 235
 Luther, 189
 Luwai, Khalid ibn, 105, 107, 117,
 170, 172

MAAN, 178, 179, 183, 205, 212
 Macdonnell, M. S., 241
 Madein Salih, 197
 Magic, 77, 235
 Mahmal, 196, 213, 238
 Majma'a, 55
 Mamluks, 42, 222
 Marconi Company, 248
 Mashhur, Farhan ibn, 228, 232, 237,
 238, 239, 240
 Mecca, 29, 30, 31, 32, 38, 42, 69, 71,
 75, 85, 102, 104, 105, 107, 109, 119
 124, 125, 142, 163, 165, 166, 167,
 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 178,
 180, 181, 185, 186, 193, 195, 200,
 201, 202, 204, 208, 221, 243, 247,
 249, 251, 256, 262, 283, 284, 296,
 289
 — (Treaty of), 238
 Medina, 31, 38, 42, 69, 104, 168,
 176, 191, 200, 203, 204, 273, 289
 Mediterranean, 29, 182
 Meissner Pasha, 69
 Mesopotamia. (*See* Iraq.)
 Midhat Pasha, 85
 Mina, 38

Minerals, 252, 290
 Mongols, 36, 274
 Morocco, 193
 Muhammad (the Prophet), 10, 30, 31
 38, 48, 75, 76, 77, 80, 82, 166, 176,
 181, 185, 187, 189, 193, 203, 208,
 255, 266, 277, 282
 Muhammara (Treaty of), 146, 147,
 148, 149, 150, 157, 160
 Muhanna, Raudhat al, 65
 Muntafiq, 143, 145, 147, 148, 169
 Murra, 20, 21, 85, 229, 261
 Musa'ad, Ibn, 241, 246
 Mushraqin, 77, 118, 131, 169, 226
 Mutair, 43, 54, 67, 68, 81, 82, 127,
 129, 160, 208, 209, 217, 219, 222,
 228, 231, 232, 260, 261
 Mutawwa, 80
 Najd, 16, 25, 29, 30, 32, 34, 43, 44,
 45, 46, 50, 51, 52, 57, 59, 61, 67,
 76, 78, 79, 80, 84, 85, 89, 90, 95,
 106, 110, 111, 113, 120, 122, 126,
 127, 128, 137, 139, 145, 148, 150,
 151, 152, 159, 160, 167, 185, 201,
 202, 203, 204, 207, 208, 209, 210,
 211, 212, 215, 218, 219, 220, 221,
 222, 225, 226, 230, 231, 232, 233,
 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240,
 241, 242, 246, 247, 248, 251, 254,
 259, 260, 261, 268, 270, 280, 286,
 288, 290
 — Hijaz Frontier, 42, 104, 108,
 111
 — Iraq Frontier, 132, 142, 143,
 147, 150, 153, 181, 182, 183, 215,
 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 232, 234
 — Kuwait Frontier, 150 151, 153,
 232, 234
 — Transjordan Frontier, 155,
 178, 181, 182, 183
 Nasiriya, 145, 146, 217
 'Neutral' Zone, 150, 160, 232

OIL, 252, 290
 Oman, 35, 39, 44, 45, 96, 198, 211,
 266, 267
 Ottomans. (*See* Turks)

Palestine, 112, 114, 122, 163, 164,
 165, 193, 261, 266, 276
 Pasture, 17, 183, 216

INDEX

Peace Conference (Paris), 110, 113
 Pearls, 18, 290
 Persia (Persians), 37, 40, 114, 173,
 176, 184, 193, 198, 281
 Persian Gulf, 11, 18, 20, 35, 60, 85,
 90, 93, 95, 105, 136, 137, 140,
 150, 177, 234, 236, 246, 248, 262,
 267, 290
 Philby, H. St. John B., 7, 35, 57,
 105, 106, 112, 115, 122, 155, 170,
 196, 249, 263
 Pilgrimage (*Haj*), 29, 119, 125, 142,
 165, 166, 167, 174, 175, 181, 192,
 196, 211, 213, 238, 248, 250, 252,
 263, 268, 286, 289, 290
 Pilgrim Railway, 69, 289
 Pilgrims (*Hajjis*), 38, 69, 148, 175,
 194, 196, 201, 212, 249, 250, 262,
 263, 283, 289
 Police Posts (Desert), 215, 216, 217,
 221, 235, 236
 Polytheism, 75, 190
 Puritanism (Puritans), 10, 16, 36,
 37, 75, 77, 117, 210, 254, 267, 278,
 286, 289
 QAF, 168, 169, 248
 Qahtan, 55, 231, 261
 Qasim, 43, 45, 51, 54, 55, 56, 61,
 62, 65, 66, 67, 68, 71, 103, 107,
 127, 128
 Qatar, 96, 211
 Qatif, 87, 95
 Qunfidha, 124, 175
 Quran, 27, 77, 173, 185, 189, 193,
 203, 254, 255, 263, 279, 283
 RABIGH, 175, 200
 Rashid (House or cause), 17, 20, 24,
 25, 28, 29, 50, 65, 66, 67, 78, 84,
 85, 90, 91, 127, 128, 129, 272
 —— Abdul aziz ibn, 22, 23, 25, 52,
 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65
 —— Abdullah ibn, 45
 —— Muhammad ibn, 17, 22, 46,
 47, 52, 57, 67, 130
 Rass, 43, 62, 63
 Red Sea, 11, 37, 38, 97, 105, 119,
 177, 178, 245, 263
 Rifada, Ibn, 245, 250
 Rihani, Ameen, 7, 118, 129, 132,
 149
 Rivers, 249
 Riyadh, 16, 21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 43,
 44, 45, 46, 47, 50, 52, 53, 54, 56,
 58, 61, 67, 79, 86, 88, 93, 97, 101,
 104, 105, 106, 108, 109, 111, 122,
 124, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132,
 136, 137, 138, 141, 144, 155, 166,
 180, 208, 209, 216, 221, 222, 223,
 226, 227, 237, 238, 241, 242, 248,
 256, 257, 262
 Royal Air Force, 137, 146, 156, 157,
 168, 169, 215, 287, 218, 219, 235,
 239, 241
 Rub' al Khali, 20, 25, 249, 263, 267
 Rumma, Wadi, 109
 Russia, 19, 20, 194, 197
 Rutter, Eldon, 175
 Ruwala, 126, 144, 155, 183, 228,
 238, 240, 241
 Ryan, Sir Andrew, 243
 SABAH, AHMAD IBN JABIR IBN, 99,
 137, 138
 —— Jabir, ibn Mubarak ibn, 54, 99,
 136
 —— Mubarak ibn, 18, 19, 20, 21,
 22, 25, 26, 52, 54, 55, 60, 61, 65,
 89, 91, 99, 135, 143, 184
 —— Salim as, 99, 110, 136, 137
 Sabia, 123, 206
 Safa, As, 219
 Sakaka, 155
 Sakha, 117
 Sakhr, Bani, 156, 169, 239
 Saints, 32, 76, 77
 Said, Nuri Pasha al, 238
 —— Ruete, 35
 Sa'id, Muhammad ibn, 32, 33
 Samawa, 41
 Sanusis, 284
 Sarif, 22, 24
 Sarrar, 229
 Sa'ud, Abdul Aziz ibn Abdur
 Rahman ibn *passim*
 —— (House or cause) *passim*
 —— Abdullah ibn, 43, 44
 —— Abdullah ibn Faisal ibn, 45, 46
 —— Abdul Aziz ibn Muhammad
 ibn, 34, 35, 36, 39

INDEX

Sa'ud, Abdur Rahman ibn Faisal ibn, 18, 21, 24, 25, 26, 46, 47, 48, 54, 56, 166
 — Faisal ibn, 44, 45
 — Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz ibn, 121, 124, 139, 155, 186, 198, 199, 200, 202, 204
 — Mishari ibn Adbur Rahman ibn, 44, 45
 — Muhammad ibn, 30, 33, 34
 — Muhammad ibn Abdur Rahman ibn 26, 127, 128
 — S'ad ibn Abdur Rahman ibn 52, 70, 71, 99
 — Sa'ud ibn Abdul Aziz ibn Abdur Rahman ibn 128, 132, 199, 203, 231, 246
 — Turki ibn, 44
 — Turki ibn Abdul Aziz ibn, 128
 Secularisation, xi
 Shakespear, W. H. I., 88, 89, 93, 94, 100, 268
 Sha'lan, Nuri ibn, 126, 127, 128, 129, 154, 183
 Shamuya, 140, 142, 149
 Shammar, Jabal, 17, 45, 135, 139, 142
 — (tribe), 17, 18, 48, 54, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 126, 128, 129, 130, 139, 140, 141, 142, 148, 157, 158, 215, 231, 261
 Shaqra, 55
 Shar' (Holy Law), 186, 202, 225, 264, 282
 Shararat, 240
 Sharifians (family or cause), 7, 60, 92, 97, 103, 105, 110, 113, 115, 120, 126, 151, 164, 177, 191, 269, 270
 Shiahs, 22, 26, 27, 29, 77, 131, 152, 173, 265
 Shinana, 62
 Shuna, 165
 Sibilla, 227
 Silk, 77, 190
 Sirhan, Wadi, 154, 160, 168, 183
 Sirr, 56
 Slaves, 211, 212
 Storrs, Sir Ronald, 101
 Subhan, Majid ibn, 56
 — Salim ibn, 47

Subsidies, 97, 115, 144, 161, 162, 165
 Sudair, 51, 55
 Sudan, 284
 Sulai, 53
 Sulaimiya, 53
 Sultan Abdul Hamid, 64, 67, 69
 Sunnis, 33, 36, 77, 152, 266
 Suwait, Humud ibn, 144, 146
 Switzerland, 197
 Sykes-Picot Agreement, 122
 Syria, 41, 112, 114, 122, 125, 135, 137, 152, 154, 163, 165, 182, 232, 262, 266, 276

Tabuk, 248
 Taif, 37, 42, 104, 105, 116, 117, 169, 170, 171, 172, 201, 204, 221
 Taimiyya, Ibn, 188
 Taqiya, 39
 Tarafiya, 22, 68
 Thomas, Bertram, 35, 263
 Thunaiyan, Ahmad ibn, 122, 139, 147
 Thuwaini, 34
 Tihama, 124, 206
 Tobacco, 77, 190, 191
 Tombs, 77, 190, 191
 Tombs, 32, 38, 76, 77, 173, 176, 190, 191
 Tor, 263
 Transjordan, 69, 135, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 164, 165, 168, 169, 178, 179, 181, 182, 183, 206, 211, 212, 220, 226, 238, 239, 240, 241, 259, 266, 270
 Trucial (Pirate) Coast, 39, 249, 267
 Tunaib, 156
 Tunis, 193
 Turaba, 42, 116, 119, 120, 168
 Turkey (Turks, Turkish), 15, 16, 17, 18, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 41, 42, 44, 46, 51, 52, 53, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 70, 71, 73, 68, 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 95, 96, 97, 102, 103, 104, 105, 107, 116, 121, 123, 124, 125, 135, 136, 139, 164, 184, 193, 197, 222, 262, 281, 285, 286, 277, 281
 Tuwaiq, 85
 Twitchell, K. S., 252

INDEX

Ulama, 32, 127, 191, 193, 209, 222, 225, 254
Umm al Qura, 202
 Uqair (Protocol of), 149, 150, 157, 285, 221
 — (town), 140, 149, 248
 — (Treaty of), 95, 96

VERSAILLES TREATY, 163

WAHBA, SHAIKH HAFIDH, 7, 205, 237, 254, 255, 262

Wahhab, Muhammad Abdul, 16, 21, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 38, 188, 189, 190, 265, 279

Wahhabi, Empire First, 31, 37, 44, 50, 57, 59, 117, 124, 187, 189, 191, 218, 271, 284, 285
 — (House or cause), *passim*

Wake, Sir D. St. A., 101

Water (watering-places, wells), 17, 80, 81, 143, 147, 148, 149, 215, 216, 250, 252, 260, 262

Washm, 51, 54
 Whitehall, 113, 115, 172
 Wilson, Sir Arnold, 100, 113, 115
 Wine, 77, 190
 Wingate, Sir Reginald, 111
 Wireless, 156, 215, 225, 242, 245, 249

YAHYA, IMAM, 64, 91, 198, 206, 207, 267, 269, 272

Yaman, 40, 51, 91, 123, 125, 193, 198, 206, 213, 265, 266, 267, 269, 270, 272

Yanbu, 173, 176, 201, 204

Yatab, 107

ZAID, AMIR, 159
 Zaidis, 206, 265
 Zilfi, 92, 227
 Zionists, 114, 122, 163
 Ziza, 168
 Zubair, 41